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DENIS LEARY TAKES ON THE NET

INTERNET underground

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A Behind-the-Scenes Tour of the Web's Hottest, Most Controversial Sites

Volume 2 . Issue 5 . May 1997

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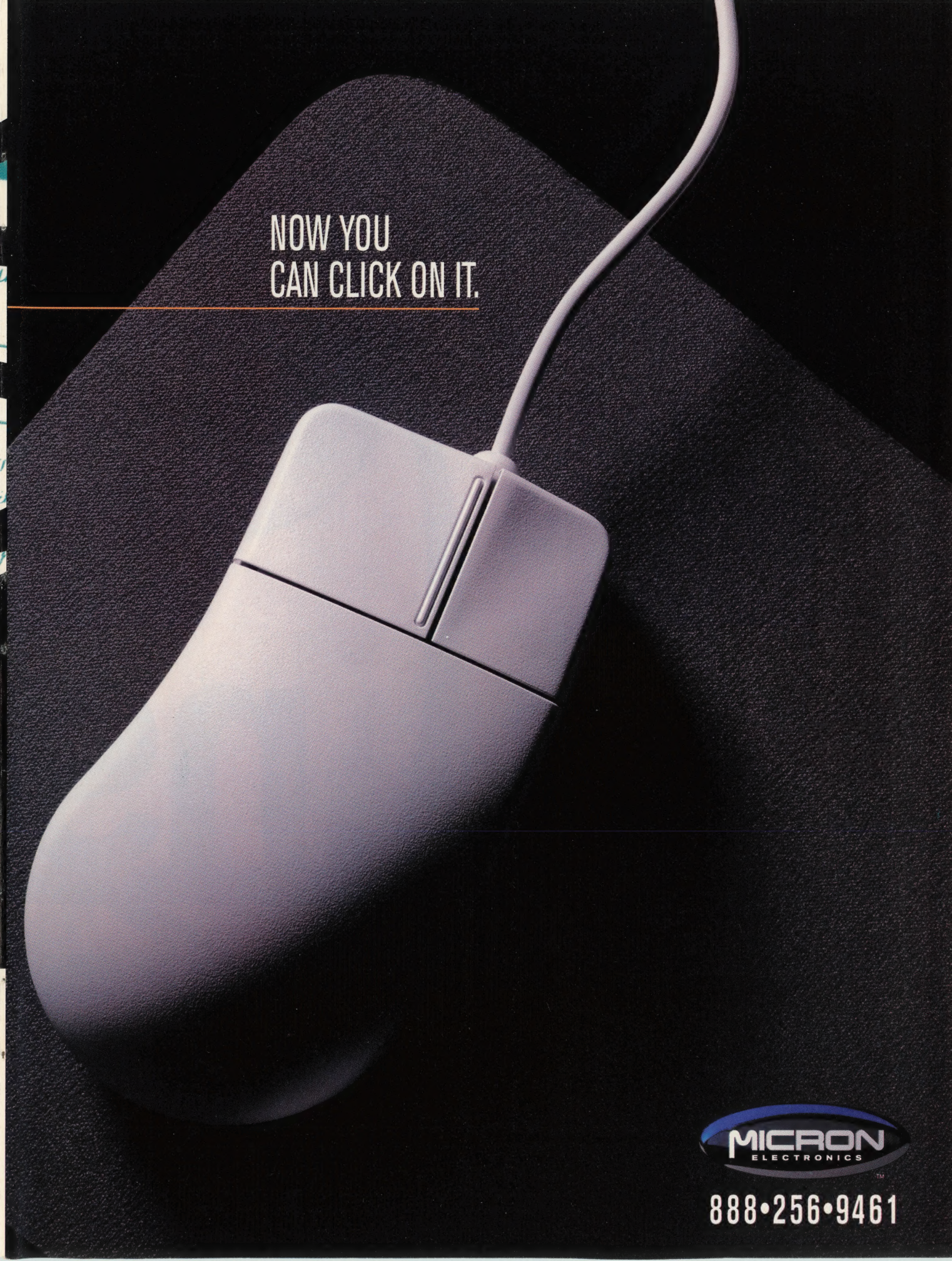
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Warning: This Month's Issue Contains Entertaining and Engaging Stories You Won't Find In Any Other Net Magazine.

If the Five Man Electrical Band (not to mention Tesla) thought there were a lot of signs back in the '70s (i.e, long-haired freaky people need not apply, anyone caught trespassing will be shot on sight), we wonder what they'd think of the current spate of admonishments on the Net. Forgetting adult sites, where you often have to maneuver your way through multiple disclaimers before being treated to a thumbnail third-generation copy of a photo from the December 1983 issue of *Oui*, nowadays even the most innocent sites are filled with farcical disclaimers warning unsuspecting netizens of the dangers that lurk just a mouse click away.

To wit:

From **oscar.com**, the official Academy Awards site: "ABC and AMPAS make no representation that materials in the site are appropriate or available for use outside of New York, New York. Those who choose to access this site from other locations do so on their own initiative and are responsible for compliance with local laws, if and to the extent applicable."

From CNN Interactive: "CNN shall have the right at any time to change or discontinue any aspect or feature of CNN Interactive, including, but not limited to, content, hours of availability, and equipment needed for access or use."

From *The New York Times* on the Web: "Following are links to the external Web sites mentioned in this article. These sites are not part of *The New York Times* on the Web, and *The Times* has no control over their content or availability."

That last disclaimer is especially comical, considering that *The New York Times* ran a front-page story in their March 5 national edition about the inanity of modern-day warning labels (e.g., a Batman costume warns consumers: "Cape does not enable user to fly"). The *Times* story concluded what most of us already know; these warnings exist only to thwart ambitious lawyers. If that woman who spilled hot coffee on herself was able to get money from McDonald's, then what, beside the disclaimers, is to keep someone from suing the Oscars because they accessed the Academy Web site from Omaha and were offended that the statuette was nekkid. Right this moment, somewhere in the country, a lawyer might be filing a suit against Ted Turner on behalf of a client who was unable to get the CNN site to load up because they were using a 386. Even more probable is someone dragging "the old grey lady" into court because they followed a link from one of their articles to (gasp) an adult site.

Speaking of which, you may have noticed the word "sex" prominently displayed on this month's cover. While we admit that on one level this was a cheap ploy to get you to pick up the magazine (the same tactic worked on those fliers we posted trying to sell our futon back in college), it just so happens that this issue is the real deal, chock-full of lurid content. So much so that we considered putting our own warning label on the cover. Instead, we decided that our readers were intelligent enough to pick up the magazine themselves and decide whether or not it offended their sensibilities.

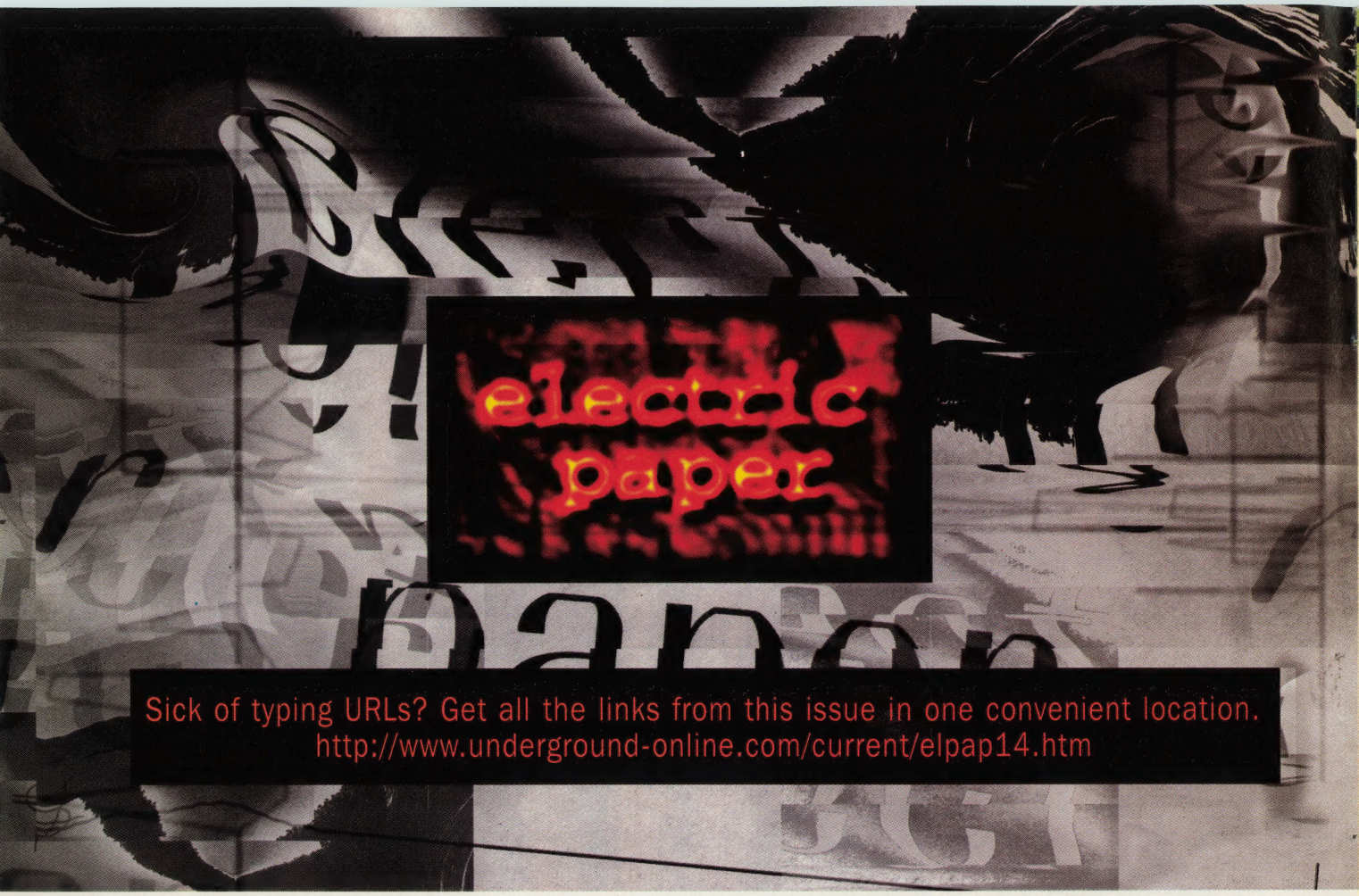
In case you're reading this on the newsstand now, let us expound a little on the utter filth you'll find on the ensuing pages. To begin with, there's our cover story, in which Contributing Editor Matt Richtel takes a behind-the-scenes look at some of the Net's most popular adult destinations, including Persian Kitty's Adult Links, Danni's Hard Drive and Janey's Home Page. If you're expecting to find out that the online porn industry is dominated by techno-porn moguls chomping on big cigars while surrounded by buxom cover girls, you'll be surprised to discover the shocking truth behind these popular adult destinations.

Not enough risqué material? Turn to this month's Netline section and read Features Editor Sarah Ellerman's report on the valiant effort of amateur erotic scribes to rid **alt.sex.stories** of all the spam and return it to its rightful place as the Net's repository of twisted X-rated fiction featuring the cast members from *Saved By the Bell*. Sarah also tackles our FAQ column this month, conducting a Q & A with an anonymous employee of an Internet filtering service, whose job as a "smut-blocker" consists of surfing the Net and deciding which sites should be banned from their "safe" service for children.

Still not enough? Well, you'll want to read Contributing Editor Mitchell Lavnick's exclusive interview with comedian and actor Denis Leary. While Leary doesn't really talk about sex at all, he does use a lot of dirty words, and in between the curses he has some really funny things to say about the Internet and the geeks that use it.

That said, that's about all the sex we have to pitch to you this month. Still, we'd be remiss if we didn't mention that there is a lot of wholesome, decent content in this month's mag to keep middle America (and our parents) happy—including stories about homemade cannons that fire watermelons, androgyny and a site about a beer-guzzling Tickle Me Elmo. And just in case you're thinking about suing us because we don't have a word about such scintillating topics as "Which search engine is best for you" or "101 time-saving tips using Netscape 4.0," we have our own disclaimer...

Warning: We, the editors, assume no responsibility for your enjoyment of this month's issue. Magazine is intended for entertainment and educational purposes solely. Shock may occur if read outdoors or on wet surfaces. Especially if you're holding an aluminum bat during a thunderstorm.



Sick of typing URLs? Get all the links from this issue in one convenient location.
http://www.underground-online.com/current/elpap14.htm

Contributors

Features Editor **Sarah Ellerman** ("Ten Sites That'll Make You Stammer," "Sex Wars," and "Confessions of a Smut Blocker") is currently involved in a long-distance relationship.

Mitchell Lavnick ("On the Net With...Denis Leary") invites you to visit the MitchCam at **www.inch.com/~mitchl/**.

Contributing Editor **Matt Richtel** ("Sex Sites Exxxposed") recently quit his job as the technology columnist of the *Oakland Tribune* because he felt the trappings of steady paychecks and health care benefits were dulling his edge. Matt has previously written about geek houses, the legalization of marijuana and online auctions for *IU*. Look for his syndicated comic *Ruby Park* sometime later this year.

Winn Schwartau ("How to Hack Across the Border") is one of the country's leading experts on information security and electronic privacy and is often referred to as "the civilian architect of information warfare." As the president of Interpact, Inc. (**www.infowar.com**), he acts as a consultant for both companies and governments on Information Warfare, hackers, electronic privacy and related issues. His work and clients span three continents. He is the author of numerous books including *Information Warfare: Chaos on the Electronic Superhighway* and *Terminal Compromise* and is currently writing two more books and working on two major movie projects (winn@infowar.com).

Michael Shapiro ("Hit the Net Before You Hit the Road") is the author of *NetTravel: How Travelers Use the Internet*, published by O'Reilly & Associates of Sebastopol, Calif. The book is available at leading bookstores and through O'Reilly's online catalog (**www.ora.com/catalog/nettravel/**). Shapiro works as a producer of online content for c|net in San Francisco. His story on people sharing their journeys on the Web, "On the Virtual Road," appeared in *IU* #11. He also wrote about information warfare in "The Future of War" in *IU* #12.

Dark Tangent ("Down on the Farm") is founder and president of Def Con (**www.defcon.org**), an annual hacker convention (dtangent@defcon.org).

Michael Whalen is a freelance writer living in New Orleans. He writes about old people and old computers and wishes he could adore his Commodore 64 one last time. His work has appeared in *Connect* and the *New Orleans Times-Picayune*. This is his first story for *IU*.

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The Password is...
What is the password for JR14MNYC? It's mine, but someone hacked it and now I need to find out my password. Please help me.
Daisys109@aol.com

Tiny says: You'll find the password and lots of other interesting stuff in our interview with Denis Leary on page 58.

At Your Service
Hello, Tiny!
Read in the last issue where you gave a reader Farrah Fawcett's address for the asking. Could you please give me Courtney Love's address?
Nat the Cat
PZCX91A@prodigy.com

Tiny says: No problem, Nat. You can reach Courtney at girlwiththemostc@ke.com. You know, Courtney is a big fan of Denis Leary, and I'm pretty sure you will be, too, after reading our interview with him on page 58.

Acro Credit
Hey Tiny, I'd just like to congratulate the *IU* staff for an incredibly fun and comprehensive magazine. I have been reading *IU* for about five or six months now, and I would have to classify it as one of my two favorite magazines of all time. I also wanted to let you know that I was surprised and very pleased that you ran the article about Kenrick Mock ("Alex, What Are IRC Games?" by Mitch Lavnick, *IU* #15). I have been frequenting his game channels for about a year and a half now, and I have always thought that he deserved some recognition.

Incidentally, you stated that the Acrosong was written by one acro player. It was really a collaboration between myself and another player, and can be read at **www.geocities.com/Broadway/1023/acrosong.html**
Keep up the great work!
Jessica Kent
tessera@bigfoot.com

Tiny says: Mitch told me he regrets the oversight. And

e-mail: mailguy@mcs.com

The art for E-mail this month comes from students of recurring *Internet Underground* illustrator Rich Borge's "Computer Graphics for Illustrators" class at The School of Visual Arts, NYC. The students were given the challenge of interpreting the concept of e-mail into a tangible form. All students submitted a piece, and **Alex Skorupski III**'s was chosen to be run as a full-page piece of art as seen here. Two other pieces were chosen to run on the following pages.

Jessica, if you thought you enjoyed Mitch's report on IRC games, you'll love his interview with Denis Leary on page 58.

Warez Wears Thin

I just started reading your mag for the first time, and I have to say it's pretty cool. But in an article on warez ("Mutiny on the Bounty" by Anthony Castranda, *IU* #15), you say that it is pronounced "Wear-EZ." The word is derived from the word "softwares," therefore it should be pronounced as "WEARS."

Mikey LeBeau
bat1@concentric.net

Tiny says: I checked with some of my underground sources, and they informed me that the word is commonly pronounced both ways. I wouldn't be surprised to see William Safire weighing in on this issue soon in his erudite "On Language" column appearing in the* Sunday Times Magazine. *To read Denis Leary's take on the subject, turn to page 58.

Warez the Logic?

Your article on warez ("Mutiny on the Bounty) was short and sweet, but you overstated the impact it has on software companies. Software companies are making a lot of money and people like me who warez every once in awhile aren't hurting them much if at all. I warezed Quake. I had it before it came out to the public, but later I bought the game. The software industry needs to get the wake-up call.

You will never stop Warez.

Killer69
killer69@pop.usit.net

Tiny says: Interesting argument, Killer. By the way, Ziff-Davis is very successful financially, so I'm sure that rather than buying issue #15, you just put it in your jacket and walked out of the store. What's that? That would be stealing? Exactly. Even though you and I don't see eye to eye on this issue, I think we both agree that all the readers will enjoy the Denis Leary interview on page 58.

Craig Sosonko

Letter of the Month

My name is Mukunda. I am very interested in this subject. Please send me more info. Thank you very much.

Mukunda.
r.albers@tip.nl

Tiny says: Mukunda, your letter was a little vague, but I think you'll find all the "info" on "this subject" in our interview with Denis Leary on page 58.

The Mag for the Recreationally Literate

What a great publication! Picked up my first copy by chance today and have enjoyed reading all afternoon. The rest of the computer fare out there was wearing a little thin; always who's biggest, who's fastest, how to get more stuff done in less time. I'm very pleased to finally find a computer mag for the recreationally literate. Liked the articles, especially David Spark's commentary ("Flamethrower," *IU* #14) and the Web site reviews.

Good job, good luck, best wishes.

Timothy A. Albers
albers@prodigy.com

Tiny says: Thanks for the kind words, Timothy. FYI, don't miss our interview with Denis Leary on page 58.

An AOL Conspiracy?

Dear Sirs,

I am writing this anonymously for various reasons. I would like to point out a serious flaw in AOL's membership numbers.

If you compare the number of hits from the various services, AOL only produces about twice as many as CompuServe or three times as much as Prodigy/MSN.

The same is true on Usenet postings.

What is the reason? AOL's flawed Net access may be one. I think the true reason is AOL has fewer members than they are reporting. If I were a stockholder, I would be pissed.

What accounting firm would put their reputation on the line over a company that has never made a profit?

Sincerely,

CLASSIFIED
nobody@hidden.net

Tiny says: I may not be the smartest man in the world, but Nobody, your argument has more holes in it than the plot of the latest John Grisham potboiler. Allow me to play Scully to your Mulderesque accusations. First off, what possible reason would you have to write this anonymously? A lot worse has been said about AOL. You accuse them of inflating their numbers, but even if it's true that hits and Usenet posts seldom come from AOL members, that doesn't mean the members don't exist. As you concede, AOL's Net access is poor, which would account for less hits from AOL members. You can't expect them to hit sites they can't get to. Also, AOL members have access to a lot of proprietary information, which means to read, say* **The New York Times**, *they can go to the* **NYT** *portion of AOL and not have to fire up the flawed browser and fight the crowds to read the Web version. As for Usenet postings, perhaps the reasons that a disproportionate number of postings come from elsewhere than AOL are that AOL members are a) too unsavvy to access, understand or even be aware of Usenet b) too shy to post to newsgroups for fear they will be ridiculed for having an AOL account and c) so satisfied with the 10 or so spams they get in their mailbox a day that they don't have to go to Usenet to read the latest spam there. Wow, I didn't know I had that in me. Thanks for taking the time to anonymously fire off your paranoid theory, and don't miss our interview with Denis Leary on page 58.

Be Like Tom

I'm sure you guys get thousands of "pats on the back"...well, here's another. Tom DeMay, Jr., is an artistic genius. I am a student of Advertising/Graphic Design/Illustration, and Tom is all that I want to be in an artist. Tom, keep up the good work, I'm looking forward to future issues.

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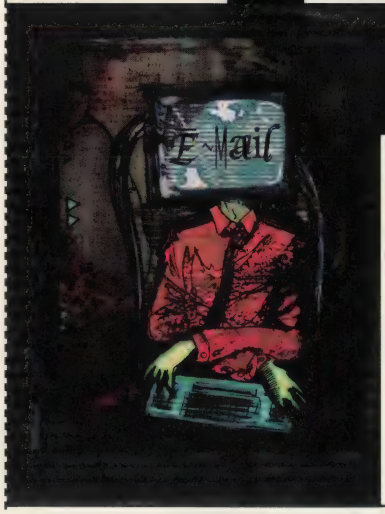
jerusalem@worldnet.att.net



Rolfe Cunningham

Tiny says: You think Tom is a genius? Well, you should see the work the assistant art director did on the Denis Leary article on page 58.

Another Letter From Tom's Family

I can still remember getting my first issue of *Internet Underground* way back in February of 1996. The first thing that passed through my head was, "Who the hell are these people?" However, that thought soon passed and turned to more important topics such as, "When am I going to score?"

Anyway, I still buy your mag. The articles are interesting, but I must say I love the art equally. The first thing most people ask when they enter my room is, "What is all that weird stuff on your walls?" Well, it's stuff from *Internet Underground*, of course.

malice@dtc.net
Chase Cookson
Wichita, KS

Tiny says: Chase, I'm sure that once you read the Denis Leary interview starting on page 58, you'll be adding those pages to your IU collage.

Up in Flames

Regarding the Flamethrower column in *IU* #15 ("Funny Money Funny Business" by Eu-Ming Lee): it's not actually true that only the federal government is allowed to issue currency. About 30 communities in the U.S. issue their own currencies (most notably Ithaca, N.Y.), and people use them for rent, wages, whatever. It's perfectly legal as long as it's reported to the IRS.

Digital cash is not so different from ordinary cash. Companies can pay their employees in cash right now, and it's completely private if neither party reports it. That doesn't mean the IRS can't catch you, if you reported a $15,000 income and bought a Ferrari. I buy most of my gas and groceries with cash, and if the store chooses not to report those transactions, there's no way for the government to know—until a larger pattern starts emerging.

What the IRS wants is a world of non-private electronic transactions, where it won't have to rely on reporting anymore. Last year an IRS official was quoted as saying that in a few years, we won't even have to file returns any more, they'll just send us a bill. Encryption doesn't much reduce government power, it simply prevents a dramatic expansion of that power.

Dennis Peterson
dennis@uncc.campus.mci.net

Tiny says: Thanks for your insightful and intriguing letter. I couldn't help but notice that your first name is Dennis. Denis Leary spells his name with only one "n," and while he doesn't talk about the spelling of his name, he weighs in on several other topics in our interview on page 58.

Licked

I could not believe the text on the cover about the Tootsie Pop Licks in *IU* #15. After reading "Is it Worth it?," I realized that you had gone ahead and answered the relentless question that was first examined by Mr. Owl. Still, after reading the thoughtful analysis, can anybody really be sure?

The world may never know.

John B.
BEERS7639@aol.com

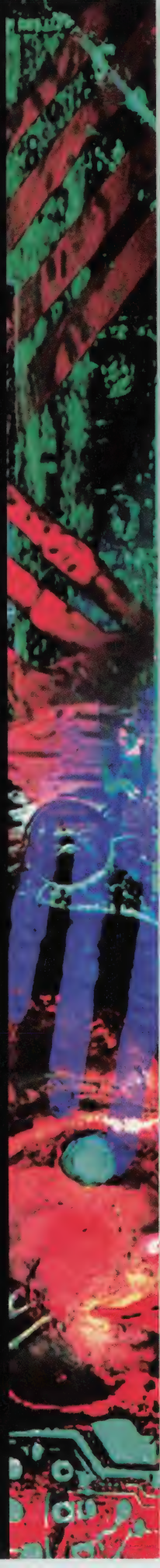
Tiny says: I guess the only unanswered question left is what the hell Retsyn is. You know who might have the answer to that question is Denis Leary, and we just so happen to have an interview with him on page 58.

Again?!

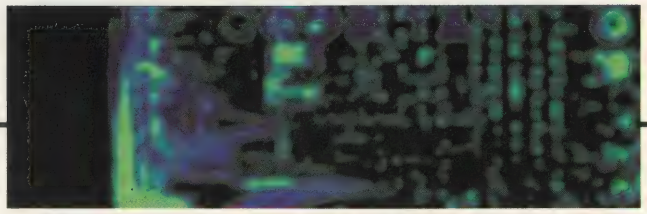
I have read your magazine with interest and I would like to know more about how Internet works and how it is connected.

Concerned Reader
110500@uniswac1.uniswa.sz

Tiny says: Listen, I don't know if you're being wise or what, but I told you last month that by sending an e-mail message you've proved you're connected to the Internet. I don't mean to be rude, but look at the back of your computer. There should be a phone cord running out the back of it—that's your connection. It's that simple. End of story. If I'm not being clear, I apologize, but c'mon, I don't think Denis Leary (see page 58) would put up with this kind of nonsense.



TOP TEN



#1 Cancel It

www.cancel-it.com

Online services, mailing lists, newsgroups...everything on or involved with the Internet is a breeze to sign up for, but canceling these services is a whole other ball of wax.

Oftentimes, trying to remove ourselves from the active roster of a mailing list is more frustrating than trying to get the vending machine in our office to accept a dollar bill. Enter Cancel It, an online consumer advocacy cancellation service that uses a universal form to void, nullify and otherwise annul any online product or service. And it's free. So next time, save yourself the time spent on hold with customer service and quit trying to decipher those confusing "unsubscribe" instructions; have the Cancel It team do your dirty work for you.

#2 Access Excellence

www.gene.com/ae

Having trouble figuring out just how a sheep is cloned? Turn to Access Excellence, "a place in cyberspace for biology teaching and learning" that aims to encourage budding scientists (who may grow up one day to work for Genentech, Inc., the company that sponsors the site). It's geared mostly toward kids and teachers, though some of the "amaze-your-friends" factoids amazed us, too: "On the Roman holiday Lupercal (Feb. 14), goats were sacrificed and the blood was smeared on two specially chosen youths. The youths would then run all around Rome with strips of goat hide in their hands. Women would strive to be beaten with these strips, known as februa (purifiers). Hence, February gets its name as the month of purification." We also liked the idea for a classroom activity involving forensic science, where students would perform "hair microscopy, blood analysis, chromatography and DNA fingerprinting." Cloned sheep, sacrificial goats, crime evidence—is this biology class or an *X-Files* episode?

#3 Fantasy Billboard

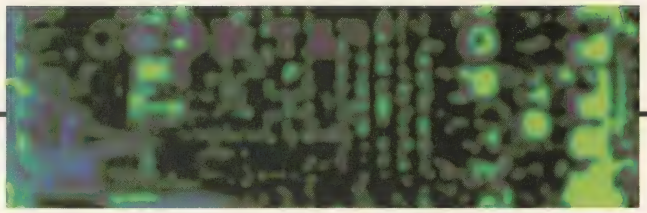
www.billboard.com/fantasy/

On the heels of the Hollywood Stock Exchange (**www.hsx.com**), our number-one site back in January, comes Fantasy Billboard. This time, rather than pretending to be a movie mogul, you're in charge of a record label. This is essentially Rotisserie Baseball for music buffs—pick six albums off the *Billboard* magazine record charts and watch as they shoot up the charts or sink like bricks. Each game lasts four weeks and the rules are complex enough to keep things interesting (no, you can't just take numbers one through six off of the Top 40 charts). Best of all, the game's free.

#4 The Digits Project

www-personal.umich.edu/~brinck/digits/digits.html

The Digits Project is an attempt to gather loads of information on the individual numbers 0 through 9 (excluding 4 and 6, which were under construction as this issue went to press). For instance, click on "5" and you'll discover all of the words that rhyme with "five;" learn that there are five Platonic solids; and find out that the fifth element is boron. Plus, there are links to the lyrics of "High Five" by Beck and the *Slaughterhouse Five* Web site. Remember, that's just "5." There's also a "Numbers of the World" feature in case you need to know the Esperanto translation of six (ses) or what's Turkish for nine (dokuz).



#5 edu: *U.S. News* College and Careers Center

www.usnews.com/usnews/edu/home.htm

U.S. News & World Report brings its college and grad school rankings to the Web. This site includes hints on how to submit electronic applications, articles on campus life and an "Answer Zone" for prospective students to vent their worries and reassure one another: "Dartmouth is but an arbitrary institution; love is a universal truth." The "fun" portions of the site, though, aren't as compelling a reason to visit as the straightforward rundown on the comparative prestige of colleges and universities: M.I.T. for engineering, Carnegie Mellon for computer science, Yale for drama, N.Y.U. for film. Not sure which field is for you? The "Careers at a Glance" section outlines some job prospects, while the "Find Your Job" section explains that every opportunity that sounds like fun has a "poor" employment outlook.

#6 Radical and Extreme Hobbies

www.voicenet.com/~surge42/reh.htm

Much testosterone pumping at this site: unbelievable stories about high-power rocketry, cannons, motor scooters powered by N2O, hovercrafts, boom tubes and other things that appeal to Monster Truck patrons. The images and sound files are amusing to view and listen to, but the written word remains the most powerful storyteller at REH. Be sure to read about the Battle of the Oranges, an annual festival in Ivrea, Italy that pits townspeople against one another in a mock battle with, yes, the orange as weapon of choice. Ooh, the citric burning!

#7 First Lines

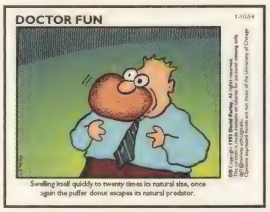
pc159.lns.cornell.edu/firsts/index.html

A sort of *Name That Tune* for literature fanatics, the First Lines Web site challenges users to name that book title given its opening sentence. At last count, the page's authors had collected hundreds of quotes that they've separated into 23 categories. The sections include books that have been adapted for the silver screen, science fiction, period pieces, women writers and Who Done Its. The *IU* staff, apart from Tiny the Mailguy, has failed miserably at all categories but one—children's literature.

#8 Toonogram

www.toonogram.com

Sending your sweetie a virtual bouquet of roses via the Web is a nice idea, but a simple GIF full of flowers might not rouse much of a reaction. Instead, try getting a giggle out of your friends by sending them cartoon postcards from Toonogram. Browse the selection of cartoons (all authored by the creator of the Web cartoon *Doctor Fun*), pick one you like and write a short message to go with it. Type in the e-mail address of your recipient, and Toonogram will send off an URL that lets your pal pick up the postcard. Seeing cartoon characters urged to "Follow the flies to Larry's Discount Meats" or to try "a puppy—it's kind of like Prozac" has just gotta be more fun than getting yet another tiresome round of forwarded Bill Gates jokes.



#9 Learn2

www.learn2.com

Nicknamed "the ability utility" by its staff of designers, Learn2 is an amazing sourcebook for all the things your parents forgot to tell you (or didn't actually know so much about in the first place). The site is vast and practical, telling readers in plain English and cute graphics how to light a pilot light, drive a stick shift, cure hiccups, tie knots, change a diaper, defrost a freezer, iron a shirt, shave, cure insomnia, use chopsticks, balance a checkbook and much, much more. Yearning to try something more esoteric? Learn2 can teach you how to shuck oysters, make a roux, handcraft paper, make a paper airplane and spin a basketball like a Harlem Globetrotter. We just want to know when the "Learn2 edit a magazine" entry is scheduled to go up.

#10 The Bride Wore...

www.visi.com/~dheaton/the_bride_wore.html

With June almost upon us, this site should be of interest to anyone who has ever stared at a bride in disbelief and horror. What is it about once-in-a-lifetime celebrations that inspires such preposterous finery? This collection of pictures of "strange, odd and unflattering wedding accessories" has category names such as "Dear Wedding Lady—My Butt Isn't Big Enough" and "Groom's Gloom." That should give you an idea of the kind of frothy frippery you're in for.

Numbers on the Net

May is sweeps month for the TV networks, so in that spirit we thought we'd use HotBot to survey the ultimate Nielsen family, the Web.

Friends 1,238,942*	*Seinfeld* 19,440
Roseanne 9,549	*Frasier* 8,071
X-Files 5,534	*Walker, Texas Ranger* 1,173
Moesha 604	*Diagnosis Murder* 553

*Although we are not professional statisticians, some members of the staff felt that the number of hits generated by "friends" may be due more to the commonality of the phrase "friends" than the runaway popularity of the show.

ALT cu

WWW

Jocks Will Be Jocks

ESPN2's ultrahip workout show *Crunch*, touted as "not for the mere mortal," is obviously not for the Net savvy, either. The show's producers feel that the general viewing public might like to own a few copies, replete with buff babes and ripped dudes, on video. Unfortunately, it seems that they're too busy making sure that the most attractive people get closest to the camera to figure out how the Internet works: A section of the show's credits directs prospective customers to e-mail them for a copy at "**http://www.anchorbay@handleman.com.**" Think us mere mortals should refrain from criticizing the gods of fitness? Give us a call at 1920 S. Highland Avenue, extension 244.

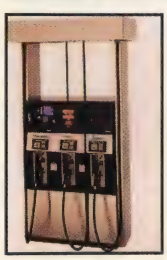
Bargain Bin

Underground Missile Base
www.manifest.com/MissileBase/

It might need a little interior decorating, but this 15,000-square-foot ex-government missile base is a steal at only $650,000, reduced from $20 million. Just south of Dallas and Ft. Worth, Texas, the secluded property lies on 17 acres of land and comes with a 2,000-square-foot military-style dwelling (great for when the kids have sleepovers), a fallout shelter, an ordinance area, a test lab, a guard house, a 10,500 gallon water storage tank and a dog kennel. And that's only what's above ground! Sturdy 7-foot-thick cement walls support three 5,000-square-foot underground units. The subterranean pad also boasts a 53-foot-long elevator with enough juice to lower 29,000 lbs. of goods. Centrifugal exhaust fans provide natural ventilation, and a "sophisticated air filtration system" is capable of filtering out radioactive fallout. It just feels like home.

Fill 'Er Up and Check the Bookmarks and Cache

In this space, back in issue #10, we ran a short satirical piece commenting on the fact that the concept of the cybercafés had given rise to a business niche in which

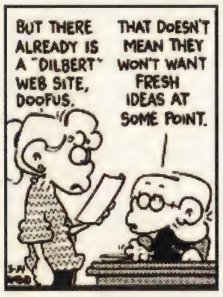


proprietors of traditional businesses could offer Net access to their customers as they shopped for groceries or washed their clothes. One of our more far-fetched examples (or so we thought), was the Cyberstation where, in our fanciful world, terminals would be built into gas pumps, allowing you access to the Web as you filled your car. Lo and behold, the lead story in the *Chicago Tribune*'s March 18 Business section about two CEOs' plans for Web domination: "Each plans to start by connecting the gas pumps down at your local filling station to the Internet." We don't want to take credit for the idea, but we wouldn't mind a fat finder's fee.

lture

Help for Hagar

While the daily comics have been capitalizing on the Net as a source of punchlines for some time, the comic *Fox Trot* by Bill Amend recently showed an unparalleled sensibility for Net culture in a week-long series. The comics focused on Jason, the youngest member of the Fox family, and his ambitious plans to help real cartoonists design Web sites for their strips.



Jason's mock-ups of potential home pages for *Cathy*, *Hagar the Horrible*, *Doonesbury* and *Dilbert* were hilarious and even somewhat gutsy by mainstream comic standards for the way they mocked fellow cartoonists. The best comic was the *Dilbert* one (see left) which, among other things, sports an ad banner from the nation of Japan ("because we really like it when American workers read cartoons all day") and has links to both e-mail ideas to Scott Adamsand to receive an explanation of "why you won't see a dime for your contribution." In case you missed them, the comics ran from March 10-15 and are archived at **www.uexpress.com/ups/comics/ft/**

Netspeak

"I think the reviewer's job is a great job. You just sit at home eating Milano cookies and hate everything."
—John Tesh, on Prodigy, giving a dig to his critics. C'mon John, you got the hating everything part right, but we have to spend a lot of time in the office doing it, and there's nary a Milano in the vending machines.

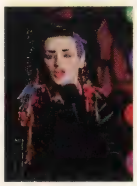
"Yeah, man, I tell you whut, that dang ol' Internet, man, you jes' go in on there an' point an' click, yeah. Talk about W W dot W com mean you got that them nekkid chicks on there, man. You go click-click-click-click-click-click, it's real easy, man."
—*King of the Hill*'s Boomhauer puts in his two cents on the debate over online porn.

"Well, I am mostly playing myself, so if that's lame, then I guess I'm lame."
—Pauly Shore, on AOL, revealing the truth as to why he and all his films suck. Amen.

Good Lord No!

Steve Urkel Swiss Fans Club
www.infomaniak.ch/~naescher/SteveUrkel/urkel.htm

Boy George
www-personal.umich.edu/~geena/boygeorge.html



REO Speedwagon
icradio.su.ic.ac.uk/music/bands/reo/

Sally Romero, portraying Peg Bundy of TV's *Married With Children*
www.endallmall.com/sally/index.html

IN 1997, THE NUMBER OF TIMES PRESIDENT CLINTON MADE REFERENCE TO THE INTERNET IN HIS STATE OF THE UNION ADDRESS:

6

OF 2,500 HOUSEHOLDS POLLED, PERCENTAGE OF USERS WHO SAID THEY BELIEVE A "STANDARD OF CONTENT RESTRICTIONS" SHOULD BE ADOPTED FOR THE INTERNET:

72 PERCENT

PERCENTAGE OF USERS WHO SAID THEY WERE AWARE THAT THEY COULD PURCHASE A CAR ONLINE:

25 PERCENT

OF THOSE USERS, PERCENTAGE THAT SAID THEY WOULD PURCHASE A CAR ONLINE WITHOUT A TEST DRIVE:

5.2 PERCENT

[The CDA Showdown]

The Supreme Court Hears Arguments On Indecent Material on the Net

AS PROTESTERS MARCHED IN A CHILL RAIN outside the U.S. Supreme Court on March 19, supporters and defenders of the Communications Decency Act squared off inside. The notorious law finally had its day in court, and its fate may well turn on which description of the Net the justices believe: the government's or that of the plaintiffs challenging the law.

Deputy Solicitor General Seth Waxman argued first. He portrayed the Net as awash in smut, saying there are "as many as 8,000 sexually explicit sites on the World Wide Web alone." Government intervention was necessary, he said, to rein in an unruly cyberspace. Waxman told the justices that the CDA—which bans the display of "patently offensive" materials online—represents nothing more than a "cyber-zoning" ordinance. Without it, "the Internet threatens to render irrelevant all prior efforts to protect children from indecent material."

COURTESY WWW.MEAT.COM/ UPYOURS/

Justice Stephen Breyer wasn't impressed. He asked Waxman if the CDA would jail high school students who wanted to talk about sex, as they might do legally on the phone. "Every high school student who would do this is then guilty of a federal crime, and subject to two years in prison?" Waxman waffled, then replied that the Net isn't like a telephone, since it also can transmit sexually explicit images.

Bruce Ennis, the lawyer representing the American Civil Liberties Union and American Library Association coalitions challenging the law, argued next. He sketched a different picture, saying that the CDA would annihilate the Net. "I want to emphasize that one of the real democratizing and speech-enhancing attributes of the Internet is that average citizens can speak to the world for free," Ennis said. He pointed out that two Federal district courts already have ruled that the law violates the First Amendment. He urged the justices to uphold the lower courts' rulings.

When Ennis started to say the only way—and an expensive one it would be—to comply with the CDA is to request credit card numbers from visitors to your Web site, Justice Antonin Scalia interrupted. "What is wrong with saying if you want to use cyberspace, you have to use the Web?" Ennis replied that much of online "conversation" happens on newsgroups and mailing lists, to which minors have access.

Ennis also stressed that the Net is international, pointing out that the CDA won't reach overseas—but the justices didn't buy it. Justice Ruth Bader Ginsberg asked if other countries have tried to ban indecent speech online. (China and Iraq ban political speech, Ennis replied.) Justice Kennedy observed "it's a weak argument to say" that the U.S. cannot "lead the way, and maybe other nations would follow."

Even if a majority of the justices agree with Ennis' view of the Net and rule against the CDA, some members of Congress have promised to try again. Sen. Charles Grassley (R-Iowa), a staunch conservative, has pledged to sponsor a revised CDA that might stand a better chance of passing constitutional muster. "Some way, somehow, we will have to find a constitutional way of doing this for kids, protecting them from porn the way we did for printed material," he said.

But any Congressional tinkering will come after the Supreme Court decides. A ruling is expected in early July.

For the oral arguments on behalf of the Appellants, the oral arguments on behalf of the Appellees and the rebuttal argument on behalf of the Appellants, head over to **www.epic.org/CDA/**.

—Declan McCullagh

[A World's-Eye View]

Omniview's PhotoBubble Technology Brings 360-Degree Interactive Shots to the Web

VRML HAS NOTHING ON THE PHOTOBUBBLE. Using a fisheye lens, Omniview, Inc.'s (**www.omniview.com**) new digital imaging technology "remaps" two opposing photographs to create a virtual 360-degree spherical image of a real space.

The technology is more than just a cool trick. The PhotoBubble is a useful tool for Web site

developers who want to immerse Net participants in a real world location—as Omniview CEO James Phillips explains, "it's about location on demand." Currently, Rent.net (**www.rent.net**) is using PhotoBubbles to show off 360-degree views of vacant apartments. For renters, the site is a timesaver; it permits them to view potential living spaces in all of their panoramic splendor on the computer first.

Toyota (**www.toyota.com**) is also making sensible use of the PhotoBubble, offering Net users 360-degree shots of the interiors of their latest models. The browser plug-in, which can be downloaded at the Omniview Web site, is also being used to show snapshots of museum galleries—unfortunately, the utility's zoom feature causes the PhotoBubble image to pixelate into a blurry mess. Phillips says that the Omniview team is working on solving that problem through other image mapping techniques that would involve a seamless overlay of high-resolution close-ups of images directly onto PhotoBubbles.

As incredible as that may sound, imagine this: a live PhotoBubble camera that takes streaming digital photographs of real-life locations. Spend a day at Santa Monica Pier, peek inside the Capitol Dome or sit sideline at a live football game. Now imagine four PhotoBubble cameras simultaneously taking shots of a football game; according to Phillips, Omniview is working on a technology that will allow those four shots to make a composite of the playing field and permit home viewers to zoom in and around the playing field at their leisure. Follow Barry Sanders through the offensive line or just sit idly by the cheerleaders.

It all sounds like sci-fi, but after downloading the PhotoBubble plug-in at Omniview's Web site, you'll have a 360-degree sense of where this technology is headed.

—Rob Bernstein

ESTIMATED NUMBER OF NEW DOMAIN NAMES REGISTERED EACH MONTH:

85,000

PERCENTAGE OF NORTH AMERICAN BUSINESSES THAT POST THE AVAILABILITY OF JOBS ONLINE:

20 PERCENT

OF THOSE BUSINESSES, THE PERCENTAGE OF HIRING THAT TAKES PLACE USING THE INTERNET:

1 PERCENT

SOURCES: BUSINESS WIRE, NEWSBYTES, NEWSPAGE, PR NEWSWIRE, WIN TREESE

[Sending a Song and Dance]

Digital Incorporates Voice and Animation Into E-mail

YOU DON'T HAVE TO SIT AND TYPE OUT AN E-MAIL JUST to tell someone that their Web site rules (or sucks). Get the new Voice Plugin from Digital Equipment Corporation and you'll be able to send them a voice message instead. The software is part of a research project and can be downloaded at **interface.digital.com/voice**. It lets anyone with the plug-in (for Netscape only), a PC and a microphone send a recorded message via e-mail, right from a Web page.

The recipient receives the message as an e-mail attachment in .wav format, so no special software is needed to listen to it. We got a kick out of sending messages from the test page: After downloading the plug-in, you can play with it by recording your voice and sending it to your coworkers, your friends or your mom.

If you've got your own Web site, you can copy a bit of HTML here to embed the Voice Plugin interface on one of your pages. Once you set it up, visitors with the plug-in can record a message that will automatically be sent to your e-mail address or, if you prefer, posted to a cgi-bin directory. (But be careful—this is an experimental, unsupported application.)

Digital is also working on a browser plug-in that will allow users to send "face mail": voice messages accompanied by an animated face that "speaks" to the recipient (**www.research.digital.com/CRL/projects/face/face.html**). The face synchronizes lip movements and expressions with the sender's recorded voice message. Text messages can also be animated—the software will translate text to speech and pair a synthetic voice with the animated face.

The face doesn't have to be human, of course. Anything that has a mouth and moves (animals, cartoon characters) could potentially be animated to deliver face mail—so that on the Internet, no one knows you're not a squirrel.

—Gloria Mitchell

[Net Briefs]

Free Internet Access

Free is good. The competition between online service providers to obtain new subscribers has become so fierce that a number of ISPs have abandoned monthly fees altogether. Interactive Hyper Net USA and Access America Internet Inc. have joined forces to deliver a freebie access service that'll generate revenue, ostensibly through an ad-supported model. Hyper Net has tested the service in San Francisco (**www.cyberfreeway.net**) and Chicago (**www.freeaccess.com**) thus far. j3 Communications, another ISP newcomer also recently announced its intention to offer free Net access (**www.j3com.com/index.htm**). It's the logical evolution in a Net world of free services, like Juno e-mail and GeoCities free personal home pages.

Planned Parenthood Prevails

Would the real Planned Parenthood please stand up?

Yes, yet another strange domain name dispute has made its way to court in recent months. Richard L. Bucci, a staunch anti-abortion activist, has been ordered by a federal judge to cease using the domain name "plannedparenthood.com." Visitors to the site had been greeted with the words "Welcome to the Planned Parenthood Home Page," only to be informed of an anti-abortion book titled, "The Cost of Abortion." The true national chapter of Planned Parenthood can be found on the Web at **www.ppfa.org/ppfa/index.html**.

Planned Parenthood® Federation of America, Inc.

Web Prank Ends in Detention

A high school student at Athol-Royalston Regional High School, Mass., has been placed on an indefinite academic suspension. The 15-year-old apparently posted a Web page (at a local ISP, The Internet Access Company, Inc.) that poked fun at several fellow students and teachers. When the principal received a copy of the home page, he immediately placed the student on suspension for inappropriate behavior. Online First Amendment rights activists are up in arms over the suspension and have raised much noise about the school's decision to control Web content.

[Using the Net to Strike Back]

Unionized Detroit Journalists Continue to Picket Online

IN THE OLD DAYS, WHEN JOURNALISTS AND PRESSMEN went on strike, the clunky metal street-corner newspaper boxes became crucial tools of war. Whoever controlled the information won: Strikers fought to bar readers from the boxes; companies tried to make sure readers could buy their newspapers.

But in the summer of 1995, when 2,500 employees formed picket lines around the *News* and *Free Press* buildings in Detroit, Mich., the old-fashioned metal boxes were barely more than relics. On the strike's first day, July 13, 1995, the *Detroit News* launched a Web site to supplement its emaciated print editions. Within a month, the unions had spent just $40 to erect the *Detroit Journal*, a Web-only newspaper written and edited by striking journalists. The *Free Press*, though, was slower to embrace the new medium; its site didn't go live until August 1996.

The Internet helped both newspaper managers and striking writers disseminate information—with appropriate spin control on labor stories—when traditional means were cut off. Because the strike began just as the Internet was starting to catch on as a mass-culture phenomenon, it was the first major labor movement a bystander could follow play-by-play on the World Wide Web.

Detroit-area readers with striking delivery people could stay in touch with local news at the *Free Press* (**www.freep.com**) and *News* (**www.detnews.com**) sites. The *Journal*'s page, in the early days, produced fascinating part-of-the-story journalism—such striking star columnists as sportswriter Mitch Albom (who later returned to the *Free Press*) and newswoman Susan Watson (who is still on strike) bared their souls exclusively on the Web.

the freep

The Detroit News

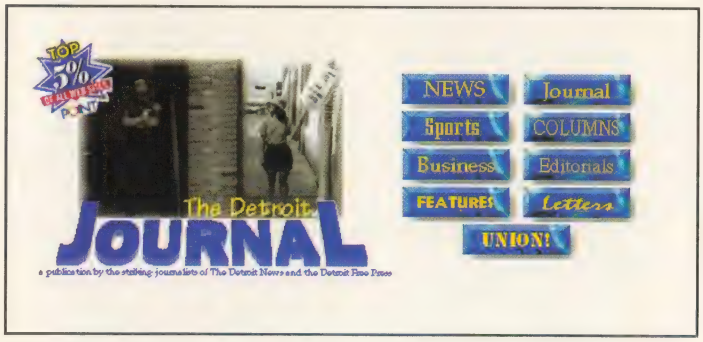
"The Internet edition was just one more way to deliver the news," says Nancy Malitz, the *News*' assistant managing editor of interactive electronic news. "And in a strike, if you are able to publish and deliver the paper, then you are prevailing."

For the strikers, the Journal's Web page at **www.rust.net/workers/strike.html** was a survival mechanism. "It was the only voice we had," says striking *Free Press* music writer Gary Graff, one of the handful of original *Journal* writers who continues to maintain the site. A print version of the *Detroit Journal* didn't hit the streets until after Thanksgiving that year.

At press time, after two long, ugly years of scab workers

and violent union protests, the strike's end may be in sight, depending on whom you ask. In mid-February, the unions offered to go back to work.

This meant, according to the papers, that it was officially over. But strikers warn not to expect labor peace just yet. A judge will soon decide if the Detroit newspapers committed "unfair labor practice." If that happens, the striking workers can return to work and dismiss their replacements. If the judge's decision goes against the strikers, the companies can put their former workers back on a "recall list." In other words, wait in line with everybody else for your old job.



Whatever happens, the long labor unrest has unquestionably dealt an irreparable blow to the jointly operated newspapers. The *Chicago Tribune* reported that combined daily circulation dropped 30 percent; Gannett and Knight-Ridder, owners of the *News* and *Free Press*, respectively, sustained combined losses of $120 million. The companies say they're starting to climb back to prestrike numbers, but the damage has been done.

Though Americans are a long way off from losing their beloved ink-stained newspapers to Internet editions, some

Detroit media observers say the strike has hastened the Age of New Media. Among these are Detroit-area computer consultant Michael R. Lewis, one of the Web's most prolific strike critics (at his site, Detroit's Final Edition, at **199.179.30.11/MIKEL/final_ed/index.html**) since the unrest began.

"I don't think most people are aware of how few newspapers make it into the hands of readers—further, how few are really read. It is certainly more cost-effective to put a paper online," Lewis says. "Is there any doubt that there will be virtually no printed daily in this town very soon? Like maybe by the turn of the century? The strike has probably done more to expedite the demise of the print edition than if it just died a slow death."

—Steve Knopper

Libraries Move to Censor Web Content

Projections by the National Commission on Libraries and Information Sciences estimate that nearly 50 percent of U.S. public libraries will be connected to the Net in the next few months. Such widespread connectivity has alarmed many who wish to censor public access to pornographic content online. Already, Boston and Austin libraries have begun installing software filters to block inappropriate sites. Unfortunately, there are no universally accepted guidelines that determine what content is appropriate or inappropriate for public access—with the American Library Association on their side, activists concerned about constitutional violations of free speech have already jumped online to protect their rights. Check out the Banned in Austin Web site at **www.realtime.net/~bladex/apl.htm**, a good primer on the whole debate.

POD Ain't Mod

A new online sci-fi racing game from Ubi Soft Entertainment, POD, is free for the download at **www.ubisoft.com**. Unfortunately, the 11 MB download only allows users to participate on a few race tracks and choose from two of the eight different vehicles. When we tried POD on our systems, it moved in awful fashion—the graphics were average and the gameplay was tiresome thanks to a lousy lag. The game may move more speedily if played with the hybrid POD CD-ROM (not yet released at press time), but for now, stick with Berkeley Systems and the new You Don't Know Jack Sports Netshow. Speaking of which...

Gone beZerk!

Yes, at **www.bezerk.com**, Berkeley Entertainment has released the all new You Don't Know Jack Sports Netshow. Additionally, the Berkeley folk have announced a new Movie version of the popular game, as well as two new Web shows: Acrophobia and the Rude Reviewer. Acrophobia (nearly identical to the IRC game #acro) challenges competing users to devise acronyms for a series of randomly generated letters (i.e. RSITWOC=Rubbing Salt In The Wounds Of Cyberspace). The Rude Reviewer will also debut at the site later this summer, an animated show hosted by Marty, a smartass of a critic who enjoys tearing into bad Hollywood schlock.

If you've been around the Web at all, you've probably seen ad banners underlined by tiny text proclaiming: "Member of the Internet Link Exchange." With over 100,000 members and nearly 28 million ad views per week, the LinkExchange, started last year by college pals Sanjay Madan and Tony Hsieh, is hard to miss. The basic idea behind LinkExchange is that you can get free promotion for your Web site in exchange for promoting other peoples' sites. Essentially, you're trading ad banners—but on a much larger scale than if you just hooked up with your buddies to advertise each other's sites.

Here's how it works: You put up a bit of HTML code on your page so that it displays an ad banner. Every time someone comes to that page and sees that banner (whether or not they follow the link to the advertised site), your "LinkExchange account" gets half a credit. For every full credit you earn, your own linked ad banner is displayed on someone else's page. The account system is tracked automatically on the LinkExchange servers.

The deal, then, is that you get to put out one banner for every two that go up on your page. That lets the LinkExchange folks retain part of the total ad inventory, which they can then sell to clients or use to advertise themselves.

If you want to stick with the basic service, though, it's free. You kick in 400x40 pixels of site space, and in return you get to hang your own banner out on the Web. You also get to view statistics on how many people visited your pages, and how many saw your ad banner. Other

[Is It Worth It?]

INTERNET LINKEXCHANGE

www.linkexchange.com

offerings include tips on site promotion, newsgroups for members and volunteer-based banner design and scanning services.

Of course, carrying an ad banner on your home page adds to the download time for visitors, since a banner increases the total file size of the page that it's on. Once you put up the HTML code provided by LinkExchange, each visitor to your page will see a banner that comes from a LinkExchange server. But since the banners are limited to 7Kb, and since they go out over multiple T3 lines, it shouldn't take more than a few seconds for a surfer on a 28.8 modem to load them.

The only other thing to worry about is whether LinkExchange will approve your site for membership. Potentially offensive sites are screened out, and your personal rantings may not make the cut. For example, the BeelzeBob Saget Page, reviewed in this month's WebGuide, was nixed as a LinkExchange applicant. You may prefer to hang onto your gritty, derisive, foul-mouthed integrity and pass up the membership.

But the reliable service and massive advertising reach provided by this network make it a good choice for promoting most sites. As one satisfied member comments, "There are so many slipshod programs starting up on the Web that it's pure joy to see one that does exactly what it should, all day, every day."

—GM

[Sex Wars]

The Battle Between Spam and Erotica on alt.sex.stories

EROTICA IS A TOUCHY SUBJECT, AND FREQUENTLY ONE MAN'S porn is another man's poem. But no matter how you may personally feel about sexually explicit newsgroups, it's undeniable that they are some of the most heavily trafficked areas of Usenet. Because they draw from every cross-section of the Net populace, their health is a pretty good indicator of how things are going for the Net in general.

In the past, groups in the **alt.sex** hierarchy were friendly communities, with lots of well-known participants and many more fascinated lurkers. Questions, fantasies and recollections were regularly exchanged, and the groups were a kind of oasis for topics otherwise *verboten* in real life. In such an environment, the commercial messages that now flood the group, such as "!!!HOT TO TROT!!!!" and "LIVE STRIPPERS AT YOUR COMMAND," aren't particularly welcome—especially when they clog a group so badly that users just turn away in disgust. Nowadays, many of the alt.sex groups are vast wastelands of spam, completely void of any fun or meaningful discussion.

One of the Net's most popular newsgroups, **alt.sex.stories**, has been the site of a heated spam war in the last few months. Spam rates were clocked at about a third of the 2,000-plus messages in the group, and many of the remaining messages were complaints about the ubiquitous advertisements. Fed-up users chose to strike back. Users have banded together to "reclaim our newsgroup" and hundreds of people have pitched in, writing and posting extra stories in an effort to increase the signal-to-noise ratio. Other users declared themselves spam cancellers and zealously forged administrative cancels to posts that they deemed inappropriate for a.s.s. As a result, the group's been greatly cleaned up.

But the question remains: can the newsgroup ever really be saved? Since the spammers do persist, it's fair to assume that their profits outweigh the minimal cost of advertising on the Net. Are there alternatives for people wanting to read erotica?

Traditionally, **rec.arts.erotica** has been the "classiest" place on Usenet to find stories and poems about sex. Literary in tone, r.a.e. has been explicitly defined as a low-bandwidth, noise-free environment. The moderator maintains ultimate control over what is posted, and posts are subject to restrictions—poor grammar, a lame plot or gratuitous violence may doom your story from ever being published.

Because of r.a.e.'s standards, demand exists for an unmoderated forum where people can be as casual, crude or out-there as they want to be, and that's why alt.sex.stories thrives. But to say that the group is anarchic is inaccurate; in fact, users' objections to spam, and advocacy of forged cancels, are part of a complex system of agreement of acceptable use, which the spammers have flouted.

Alt.sex.stories works precisely because there *is* no censorship. Users who want to escape the spam don't want that freedom to come at the possible cost of having content censored by a moderator. The idea that a post might be rejected according to someone else's ideas of what is acceptably sexy is anathema to a.s.s. regulars. So, a compromise solution has come about in the form of **alt.sex.stories.moderated**. The group's moderator, Eli the Bearded (eli@netUSA.net) found that assigning a moderator in the traditionally unmoderated **alt** hierarchy was "a big grey area of protocol... I posted my proposal a couple of times and asked permission of the readers. One or two people raised some questions about my acceptance rules, but many people just wrote, 'Do it.' So I did." After promising to post anything that could genuinely be called a story, and swearing to block all spam, Eli managed to get himself recognized in many circles as the moderator.

The big obstacle now is that many news servers don't host **a.s.s.m.**, so the push is on to spread the word and convince more ISPs to carry the group. After that, all that's left to do is to get everyone to make the jump, and the spammers will be left in the lurch.

—Sarah Ellerman

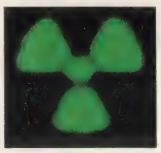
"..AHH THE SUPERHIGHWAY! I DRIVE, SHE NAVIGATES."
www.yil.com
YOU'VE SEEN THE MAGAZINE, NOW TRY OUR WEB SITE
Surf School Tools and tips to help you tame the Net.
Incredibly Useful Site of the Day The Web can make your life easier, if you know where to look.
Daily Double Scoop Just enough Net news and gossip.
Weekly Columnists Our cyberscribes share their insight into how the Net inspires and infuriates.
YAHOO!
Internet Life

weird on the web

Sexy Sayings

www.planetary.net/cgibin/spew.pl?number=5&headline=sex&newtitle=Sexy+Sayings

Like the Random Monty Python Skit Server, this page takes you to a new selection of text each time you reload. In this case, what you get is a set of "sayings" that read like Mad Libs pages thought up at a party of sexual deviants. Using a randomized collection of subjects like "cross-dressing midget," verbs like "defiled" and objects like "rampaging cod," the Sexy Sayings server comes up with surreal descriptions of unlikely sex acts: "'Sweet Jesus!' wheezed the nymphomaniacal cheerleader as the slurping ex-celibate devoured her bovine earlobes." While this site offers definitive proof that dirty pictures aren't the only things parents need to worry about, it's strangely appealing (or maybe we're just sick, sick, sick).



Mouth Jewelry

www.smoe.org/braces/

Anna Nicole Smith loves men with braces, according to a quote at this site (too bad you didn't get to meet her when you were 13). And she isn't the only one; seems lots of people are into the hypnotic dazzle of a mouthful of metal. Mouth Jewelry is "for people who have braces as well as people who like the sight of braces"; it includes pictures of famous tin grins (like Chelsea Clinton's); images of torturous-looking orthodontic devices like bionators and bite plates; and the Braces Book of Records, which tells of a young woman who got braces at the age of 6, has had them for 15 years, and doesn't want to get rid of them.

The Illustrated Guide To Breaking Your Computer

members.aol.com/spoons1000/break/index.html

Should you ever decide to act on the impulse to smash your recalcitrant computer to smithereens, Tom "Abort, Retry, Fail, THIS!" Murphy is here to guide you through the process. Tom, a high school senior, notes that there's a right and a wrong way to blowtorch circuit boards, that it's best to score the glass on the monitor before breaking it, and that you should make "menacing evil faces" to intimidate your keyboard before going at it with an electric drill. If you can't wreak wholesale destruction on your disk drive without losing your job, you might at least take this piece of advice:"3.5" computer disks are inexpensive, easy to find and fun to break."

Densa

densa.com

Swing and a miss! The creators of DENSA, a site promoting "the zen of being stupid," try to take a jab at the high-IQed folk at MENSA, but embarrassingly miss their mark. Inane and wholly unclever, the site really feels as though it were conceived by a bunch of morons (the content aspires to be satire, but really only succeeds in being foolish). Pictures of actors who belong or don't belong to DENSA occupies most of this unusual waste of time.

The Body Inflation Fetish Homepage

members.aol.com/lvkane/index.html

Stranger than most fetish pages (and that's saying a lot), the Body Inflation Homepage has proven, once again, that our staff has indeed not "seen it all." The anonymous author of the site, who goes by the alias Luther Kane, has a "special fixation" on images of inflated people. No, not inflatable dolls, but inflated people. And by inflated people, we don't mean overblown personalities like Rush Limbaugh. Instead, think of Violet, the expanding golden-ticket winner in *Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory*. Hey, whatever floats his boat.

Sesame Strip

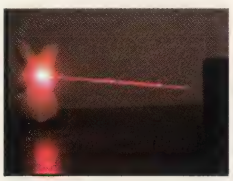
www.ziplink.net/~zbrett/sesame.html

It's not the *Sesame Street* you grew up with; Sesame Strip is the darker side of public access television. Meet a beer-guzzling Tickle Me Elmo, learn about Ms. Piggy's tragic rehab travails, and read through Bert and Ernie's gay lifestyle guide. It's an amusing site, despite the section devoted to a mock television show featuring Bob Dole in drag.

The Bunny Survival Tests Homepage

www.pcola.gulf.net/~irving/bunnies/index.html

Reminiscent of the mad Twinkie-bashing experiments conducted at the T.W.I.N.K.I.E.S. Project (**www.owlnet.rice.edu/~gouge/twinkies.html**), the Bunny Survival Tests (BST) turn a contemplating eye on marshmallow bunnies, studying their resistance to varied environmental pressures. The sometimes cruel and unusual tests (all detailed at the site with graphics of the control and experimental confectionery bunny subjects) include electrocution tolerance, laser exposure and oxygen deprivation. Unfortunately, not all of the marshmallow bunnies made it through the experiments in one piece; some degraded into sad, ooey-gooey messes of morbid mallow—all in the name of science.



Hootie and the Blowfish Suck

www.onyxtech.com/fstreet/hootie.htm

For those of you who have been a little slow to come to the above realization, or for those of you who, heaven forbid, still crank up the car radio every time "Let Her Cry" comes on, here's an alternate view from a guy who considers Hootie the worst entertainers to come out of South Carolina since Vanna White. For instance, did you know that Hootie was to blame for the New York Rangers' early season woes last season? The site is a little barren (not that you need many reasons to hate the band), but we're looking forward to the promised coming attractions, including "highlights of me booing Darius when he sang the national anthem at an Orioles game last year."

Celebrity Whack-A-Mole

www.xvt.com/users/kevink/mole/

From the demented and inspired mind of Kevin Kelm (the Webmaster behind the Virtual Missile Base Tour, our #1 site way back in *IU* #4) comes Celebrity Whack-A-Mole, a cyber version of the popular Chuck E. Cheese game where you thump various celebs on the noggin as they pop out of their holes. While it's very therapeutic whacking such bothersome personalities as Geraldo, O.J. and Cher, make sure you watch out for the spotted owl and Mother Teresa. If you hit either of the endangered species, you lose major points (not just in the game, but in real life as well).

Sad Mr. Wu's Send-a-Pickle Service

www.icon-stl.net/~jbpeck/wu/

Sad Mr. Wu is downtrodden (contrary to the site's logo, see right) because he has been forced to temporarily halt this important enterprise. Mr. Wu explains, in a page from the Steve Case handbook, that due to the overwhelming response to his pickle-sending service, he has been unable to keep up with the crush of orders. Mr. Wu is apologetic, especially to those people who sent money and never received a pickle, and he assures site visitors that he's working hard to develop a more "efficient pickle-processing system."

The Giant Hatpin Collection

wnc.com/hemsath/hatpin.htm

This is the site of an enormous hatpin collection which the owner admits has gotten "kinda out of control." (At least he realizes the extent of his madness.) The site catalogs over 1,100 hatpins and tie tacks, and is constantly trying to solicit more donations from Web users. You'll find pins commemorating the Olympics, *Spy Vs. Spy*, Cheeselovers of America, Homer Simpson, Weight Watchers, the KKK and vacation spots such as Myrtle Beach. Odder entries include a Pizza Hut "200 accident-free hour driver" pin and a Skoal pin reading, "If You Expectorate with Me—You Gotta Chew."

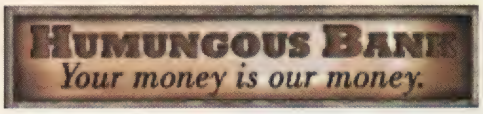
eday.simplenet.com/Night/html/vomit.html ◄

Do yourself a favor, don't check out this site.

Humungous Bank

www.humungous.com

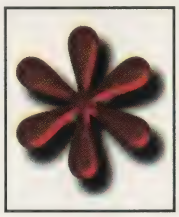
At first it seems awfully strange that anyone would pay the $100 InterNIC fee just to set up this faux online bank—but when you finally make it though to the end of the site, the reason for it becomes clear. It's merely a gimmicky parody of the banking institution set forth by Richmond Savings, a Canadian credit union looking for a little PR. Doh! We were suckered. The page is actually amusing at times, particularly when it bashes on CEO-types. Be careful not to confuse it with humongous.com, a subsidiary of GT Interactive that creates kids' games about characters like Fatty Bear™, Buzzy the Knowledge Bug™ and Pajama Sam™.



Anonymous Message Server

www.smalltime.com/nowhere/anon/anon.cgi

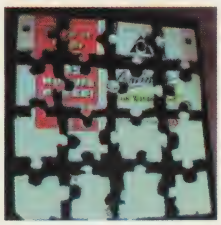
The Anonymous Message Server is known by a host of other names, including "the page that sits in the corner and does as it's told" and "so much fun, it makes you sick!" If you miss the curiously '70s pastime of sitting in a public bathroom scribbling a message for a random person to read, the Server will fulfill your graffiti needs. Just put down your deepest thoughts (or dirtiest limerick), hit send, and you'll be rewarded with the previous user's bizarre musings.



AOL Art

home.fia.net/~mlambert/aolart.html

Twisted works of art such as "This Is Your Brain on AOL" and "Unholy Triptych" line the walls of this virtual gallery. The project was born out of Michael P. Lambert's repeated tries to use those ubiquitous AOL spam disks for his own personal use—but the darn disks were so cheap that they kept erasing his data! Furious, Michael destroyed the disks with his bare hands and called it art. In later months, he developed a more refined style, using drills, glue, scissors and other tools to create opuses such as "Mr. Potato Disk."



Kraft Dinner Worship Page

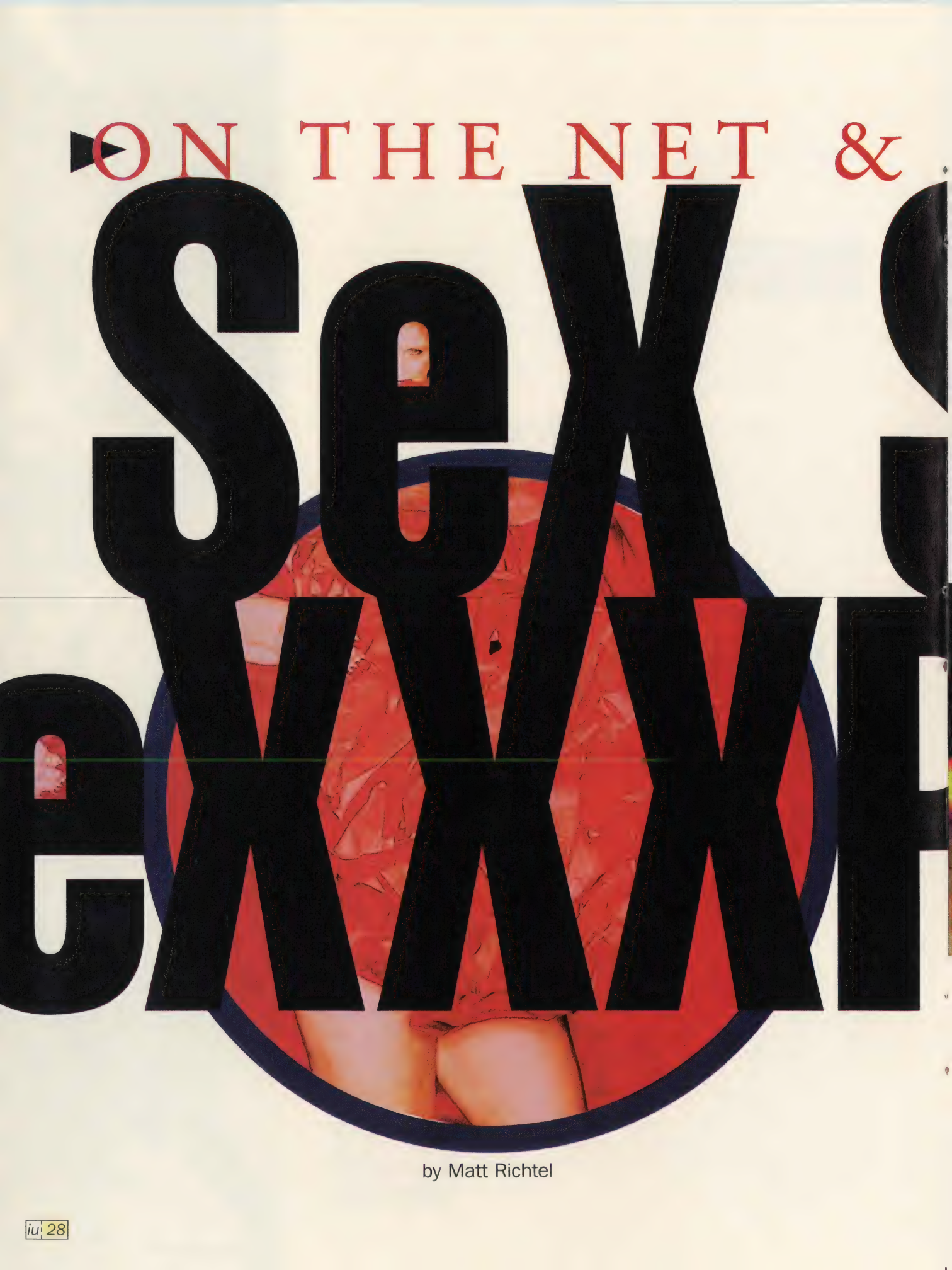
auraland.com/mc/

A shrine to the second cheapest foodstuff at the Piggly-Wiggly. (Ramen is the cheapest, in case anyone is really that out-of-touch with the starving-student thing.) The author of the page is a hard-working magician, and he notes, "I know it's been called the poverty pack, but I am a free spirit who likes to carve out my own living rather than work for 'THE MAN.' There have been days when those little yellow noodles doing their dance in the boiling water were a celebration of life. Yes, another day that I won't starve. Those wonderful people at Kraft have bundled survival in a box." Sections such as "No milk, no margarine, no problem" and "Don't be afraid to experiment" encourage doctoring it up with stuff like ketchup and, uh, Absolut Peppar.

ON THE NET &

SEX &

CRIME



by Matt Richtel

IN YOUR PANTS:

SITES POSED

On a typical morning in her Tacoma household, Beth Mansfield sends her husband off to work and prepares lunch for her two boys. After dropping them off at school in the Corolla, she settles into her home office to spend yet another day scouring the Internet for the latest in hot, raunchy, XXX pornography.

"I'm probably the strangest adult cruiser there is. I go and look at the structure (of a site), look at what they offer...count the images...and I'm out...It's kind of like an OB/GYN type of thing."

It's a time-consuming process using search engines and following new links, but Mansfield is nothing if not diligent. The finicky former accountant divides the free sites from the pay sites, then breaks them down by content: hard-core, soft-core, gay, woman-on-woman, and various other specialties and permutations less fit to print.

The uncensored smorgasbord of smut delivered via her T-3 line no longer shocks her, although she says she certainly hasn't developed a taste for it. She'd rather look at her needlepoint or the pictures her sons have drawn that hang on the walls of the dining room, which doubles as her home office.

"I'm probably the strangest adult cruiser there is. I go and look at the structure (of a site), look at what they offer...count the images...and I'm out," Mansfield says. "It's kind of like an OB/GYN type of thing."

Netizens likely won't recognize the name "Mansfield," but many more than will admit it know her online moniker, Persian Kitty. Mansfield is the creator and keeper of Persian Kitty's Adult Links (**www.persiankitty.com**), a catalog of more than 1,000 hot links to pornographic Web pages that has become a veritable Yahoo! of adult content. By conservative estimates, 270,000 visitors pop by Persian Kitty daily to check the unparalleled list of the lewd and lascivious.

The traffic makes Persian Kitty an extreme, but not unique, example of surprisingly successful adult sites started by innovative, ambitious and sometimes unlikely entrepreneurs. While the pundits and academics search in vain for how best to turn the Web into gold, these small porntrepreneurs are exploiting a simple equation: the newest technology + the world's oldest commodity = big money.

These bite-size Larry Flynts in turn are mocking the conventional wisdom that says the Web is not yet a viable commercial medium. They are proving that a site need not cost millions to make millions, and that consumers will indeed engage in credit card transactions via the Internet.

In the case of Persian Kitty, the site has been lucrative beyond Mansfield's wildest fantasies. The home page, which the 36-year-old housewife started on a lark 18 months ago, now generates $80,000 a month in advertising, 70 percent of it profit. In short, it has been an awesome trip for Mansfield, who launched Persian Kitty simply "to see how many people I could bring into my corner of the Web."

"I feel like I've won the lottery," says Mansfield, who plans to invest the profits in a larger house and a minivan. "I guess I was just in the right place at the right time."

Mansfield is not the only one cashing in on online pornography. PC Meter reports that of the 20 most popular Web sites, two are adult sites (they are the only two of the 20 that charge visitors). Of the top 500 sites that get 1 percent or more of the traffic, 50 are adult sites. Put it this way—the "cybererotica" site ranks as the 14th most popular, one slot above **www.Disney.com**.

Various theories are bandied about to explain pornography's disproportionate standing on the Internet. One is universally agreed upon: Adult sites don't just sell easy access, they sell anonymous access. "You don't need sunglasses and a trench coat when you're surfing the Net," said Greg Wester, research director for the Boston-based Yankee Group.

The popularity should come as little surprise given that pornography has driven the adoption of numerous other technologies, such as the video camera and video-on-demand. It is also widely thought that VCRs were initally brought into the home to watch dirty flicks. Only after this introduction did the technology become as much a part of the family as the dog.

"This is the typical technology adoption cycle," says Kate Delhagen, an analyst with Forrester Research Inc. "Who knows, maybe the people who are giving their credit cards now to buy (online pornography) will eventually give them to buy flowers for their wives."

Perhaps less typical of the cycle is the early success of individual entrepreneurs who have little experience in the field, and less financial backing. Take the case of **www.Janey.com**, which Steph Huntington started in February of 1996 as a way merely to test his prowess with HTML coding.

Huntington initially posted a home page featuring eight provocative, but fully-clothed, pictures he had taken of his wife

PHOTO BY ERIC TUCKER

Janey Huntington, successful amateur model and grandmother of two, delivers pornography with a personal touch

Janey. He did so as an interim and experimental effort before he built the page that was his ultimate goal—an explanation of the international standards for environmental and quality management.

The Huntingtons, however, soon realized they were on to something with Janey.com. Janey spread word of the page on IRC channels and within a couple of weeks, the page had registered 20,000 hits. (To this day, Steph says he hasn't gotten one hit on his environmental standard page).

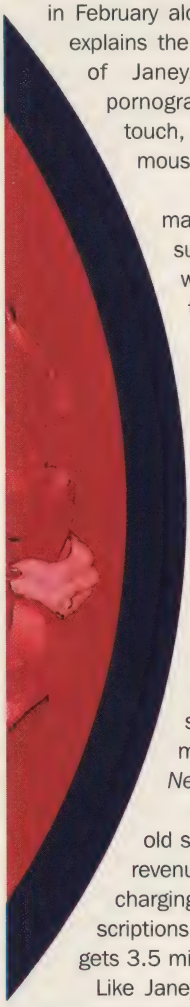
Janey.com, meanwhile, has blossomed into one of the Web's dominant "amateur" sites. It attracts 14,000 visitors a day who come to see topless pictures of Janey, a 45-year-old grandmother of two, and more hard-core images of other non-professional models, including housewives, college students, a lifeguard and a waitress from Hooters.

As with Persian Kitty's Adult Links, Janey's traffic has translated into big advertising dollars. The Huntingtons say that they earn between $8,000 and $10,000 a month selling banner advertising space. Most of the space is purchased by larger adult sites, although there is one pizza restaurant advertising delivery. The couple also makes money selling the models' pictures ($6 for six photos) and their bras and panties. The panties go for $30 each and come with a picture and a personalized note.

Lest you get the idea the Huntingtons merely backed into their success, understand that Steph, a retired executive, has undertaken to run it as a full-fledged business operation. In one bedroom in their four-bedroom house in Diamond Bar, Calif., the couple houses several powerful Unix Apache servers, with Pentium Pro 200 brains and 256 megabytes of memory each. The Huntingtons sell space on the servers to other adult sites, a source of an additional $4,000 a month in revenue.

The Huntingtons have bigger plans still. They are launching a new pay site called Private Reserve that will charge $15 to $20 each month for more hard-core pornography. They also plan to offer videoconferencing and pay-per-view sex.

While Steph runs the business side, Janey personally responds to each of the 150 e-mails she receives each day. She also takes time to wear every pair of panties before she mails them out, which can become time-consuming considering she sold $1,700 worth of undergarments in February alone. She said the effort explains the reason for the success of Janey.com: Consumers of pornography want a personal touch, not necessarily anonymous hard-core imagery.



"I can't tell you how many guys are lonely or suicidal or by themselves who write," says Janey. "I think there are a lot of lonely people out there I can help."

A similar philosophy underlies the efforts of Danni's Hard Drive (**www.danni.com**), a site aggressively run by stripper Danni Ashe. The Hard Drive features pictures of Ashe, 29, her officemates, and images she presciently licensed from magazines called *Naughty Neighbors* and *Score*.

Ashe expects the 2-year-old site to gross $2 million in revenue next year, largely from charging $9.95 in monthly subscriptions. She said the Hard Drive gets 3.5 million hits a day.

Like Janey, Ashe believes smaller pornography sites can compete because they give visitors a sense of intimacy. At the same time, Ashe also agrees with Steph that it will get more and more difficult for small sites to establish themselves. "The (door) isn't closing for the little guy, but it's getting more and more difficult," says Ashe. "It's harder and harder to get seen unless you spend a lot on advertising."

One gets the feeling Ashe will continue to fare well. A perfectionist and aggressive businesswoman, Ashe runs the Hard

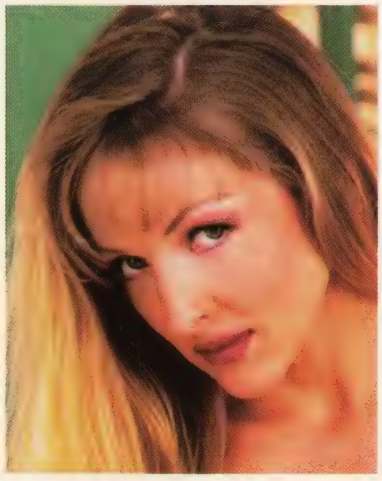
Janey also takes time to wear every pair of panties before she mails them out, which can become time-consuming considering she sold $1,700 worth of undergarments in February alone.

Drive out of a business park in Los Angeles with the zeal of Bill Gates taking on Netscape. To publicize the site, for example, she trades for advertising space in magazines like *D-Cup* and *Juggs* by doing photo shoots for them. It is a business model she pioneered.

She has also managed to attract copious mainstream press. She has been interviewed by Roger Ebert, and appeared in such diverse publications as *Interactive Week* and the *Los Angeles Business Journal*. The attention is far different from what she was accustomed to in a decade of stripping.

"The other day, my husband and I were at the newsstand and we were looking at (pictures of me in) computer magazines, not titty magazines," she said. "It's very strange."

Ashe will not disclose her profit margin. It is evident, however, that unlike Persian Kitty or Janey, Ashe's use of professional models and her more aggressive operation eats into the profits.



3.5 MILLION HITS A DAY: DANNI ASHE OF DANNI'S HARD DRIVE

Still, she is smaller than the heavy hitters from the porn industry that increasingly are making their presence felt on the Web. Major magazines, video houses and, in particular, phone sex companies are weighing in with slick, multimillion-dollar Web sites.

Seth Warshavsky's Internet Entertainment Group, an offshoot of his once $70 million-dollar phone sex operation, spent $3 million developing 12 sites, including ClubLove (**www.clublove.com**) and GirlsGirlsGirls (**www.girlsgirlsgirls.com**). His Seattle office has an administrative staff of 25 and it consumes $350,000 a month in overhead.

He is approaching the Internet as pornography's next great medium, a portable storefront that brings buyers of sex exactly what they want, exactly when they want it. He projects the company's revenue at $20 million next year. To position itself, IEG has made numerous investments, creating partnerships to broadcast the live conferencing for *Penthouse* magazine, and to provide Web services to the major XXX movie houses, Vivid Video and Seymore. IEG has also licensed the exclusive Internet conferencing rights to eight of the biggest porn stars.

He even speaks of Internet pornography in terms of big business. "We've been very successful about tying up content and real estate," says Warshavsky, possibly referring to the contracts with the porn stars. "There's not a lot of people entering the market like we have."

The presence of big players is double edged for the smaller porntrepreneurs. On the one hand, it represents obvious competition. On the other hand, the advertising spent by the big players helps keep smaller sites in the black. Not including the $100,000 it spends in print media, IEG pours $200,000 a month into Internet advertising. Its banners appear on about 1,600 Web sites, including a number of smaller sites.

The big sites have also helped drive the technology, which could be good for the industry as a whole, according to entrepreneurs of all sizes. For example, IEG is pioneering new video conferencing technology. It has begun to license its 24-hour live sex sessions to any and all other adult sites in exchange for 50 percent of the profits.

"We don't feel like we're competing with them at all," Huntington said. "They've been a good friend to us."

As for Mansfield, well, she's worried all of the time. She constantly fears that someone will create a better list of links, or a more popular service. "I'm afraid to relax because I'm afraid it could all go away tomorrow," she says. "It may be that in two years I'll be pounding the pavement looking for work."

So for the time being, the unlikeliest porntrepreneur of them all will continue to put in 12-hour days, checking sites, hunting down the latest adult content, making sure her servers are up, running a site whose name, despite its provocative implication, comes from Mansfield's Persian cat.

"If Smokey only knew," she says.

Ten Sites That'll Make You Stammer

We've saved you a lot of time and frustration here. No broken sites, no disappointment, no fruitless clicking about on the Net. A healthy mix of conversation, pictures and stories, these sites demonstrate the vast range of sexual attitudes online—from delicate, sensual suggestions to out-and-out raunch.

Bianca's Smut Shack
www.bianca.com
Bianca's smut shack is a libidinous haven for the wild at heart and smart of brain. Read smut, or chat with other pervs.

All the Beauty That Is Woman
www.beautiful.inter.net/
Positive attitude, free pictures, naughty stories, sites rated and reviewed, and "try b4u buy," a sampling of pictures purchased from around the Net.

Justin's Links From the Underground
www.links.net
Sex links woven in with honest, thoughtful writings; a living demonstration of the idea that sex can be integrated with the rest of our lives.

Adult-Oriented Site of the Day
www.aosotd.com
A quality site recommendation every single day, along with hundreds of past winners to visit.

Erotica Archive
www.netusa.net/~eli/erotica.html
Archives of Usenet's erotica newsgroups, rec.arts.erotica and alt.sex.stories.moderated. The place to find great sex stories—and it's searchable by your favorite title, author or kink.

Naughty Linx
http://www.naughty.com
A remarkably Yahoo-lookin' directory of over 4,000 naughty destinations with descriptions and a killer search engine.

Reclaiming the Erotic
www.rippleeffects.com
A thoroughly intelligent look at the nature of the erotic. Gentle, playful, fascinating and *hot*.

Persian Kitty's Adult Links
www.persiankitty.com
Enormous, comprehensive link site—done by a woman who works hard for the money, so hard for it honey.

Cyber-erotica
www.cybererotica.com
An extremely popular site with tons of pix, XXX chat and live stripshows.

Blowfish
www.blowfish.com
"Cool Sex Stuff, for Cool People, Who Have Sex." An amazing catalog of fun toys and reading material.
—Sarah Ellerman

NIGHT OF THE LIVING (COMPUTER) DEAD

by Mike Whalen

LOAD: NOSTALGIA.

Apple II, II+, IIe, IIc, IIc+, IIgs.
Atari 400/800/1200XL/600XL/
800XL/65XE/130XE/XE Game System.
Commodore 64/128.
Sinclair Z-80s/Spectrum.
TI-99/4a.
Coleco Adam.
TRS-80 and CoCo.

Witless computers. Yesterday's technology. Junk.

The companies, if they still breathe, want these systems dead. They hurt the sales of shiny, new "real" computers. Shoot them in their 8-bit heads and dump them in a landfill. They deserve only our pity.

But despite the computer makers' shortsightedness, despite their greed and rush to relegate old models to obsolescence, these computers survive as martyrs. And though they age, though their processors and tape drives and keyboards collapse from heat damage and turn into the rotted fruit of a bygone era, they live. They live because of hardware and software folks who tinker and repair and write emulators to preserve fantastic old software.

Why do they live? What can they do in today's TCP/IP stacked, 30-Meg word processor world? Why would anyone dare admit to blowing the dust off these electronic simpletons?

"It's a rebellion," says Tom Carlson of the Obsolete Computer Museum. "People like to hang on to their old computers for memories, or they feel they're being pushed into buying new systems when their old ones do just fine."

Frequently, computer companies yank support just when imaginative programmers and hardware hackers start to work magic on their computer systems. Now that most of the '80s companies are dead, those programmers and hackers do whatever they want to keep their old systems alive.

Come. Witness the renaissance of forgotten systems.

LOAD: BOBBING FOR APPLES.

Apple ripped the II series from its core in the early 1990s and turned its corporate back on legions of devoted Apple users. Why? The Macintosh. So says Peter Leithen, Apple fan, "The Mac came along and Apple IIs were intentionally held back to give Macs a lead."

Many Apple fans still taste that sour deal. But when you have some of the best fruit of the '80s, you don't let it rot. You sow new seeds. You attach hard drives and Zip drives; scanners and modems; networks and accelerators and Internet shell accounts. You construct public FTP sites to archive old software and you become a licensed copier of system software.

You prepare for the day when 800-SOS-APPL finally says, "An Apple II what?"

And you get desperate sometimes: "I've seen a 64mHz IIgs that a friend accelerated. It ran for about two minutes before things started to overheat and catch fire. It's one of those times I wished I had a camera," says Leithen.

But most of all, you realize there's little these wunderkind computers can't do, even almost 20 years after the first Apple II.

LOAD: ATARI FORCE LIVES.

8-bit Atari users started traveling Obsolescence Road in 1992, when Atari officially dropped support of its 8-bit line. Weep not for Atarians, however, for they are fierce and loyal. Usenet newsgroup leaders sound the call and gather the community: "Avoid the melancholy Windoze world! Dig up your Ataris and breathe new life into them!" And the users, thousands of them, mobilize and listen. And they listen harder since July 31, 1996, the day Atari died.

Atari 8-bit computers are Frankenstein monsters, ripped and sewn and pieced together to help them cope with today's world. Many Atari 800 owners run BBSs and a few users work SLIP connections. Full Web capability is not far behind. Third-party developers make RAM boards, write OS upgrades and manufacture faster processors.

In other words, Atarians strap their computers to a wooden plank, hoist them to the roof, aim lightning at them and scream, "Atari's ALIVE! It's ALIVE!"

All this to use their old word processors and play their old games. But most of all, to prove to the rest of the computing world that they can.

LOAD: AHOY! 64.

For many fans, myself included, Commodore was a heavy vessel adrift in turbulent waters, no one at the helm. Despite the lack of direction, Commodore users seized every computer that sailed out of Westchester, Pa., and the Commodore 64 is still the flagship of the fleet. There are probably a million of them out there surviving Commodore's capsize.

Since Commodore was hardly ever there for its seaworthy machines, its captains took control, ripping out innards in favor of more efficient steering. The C64 could always do word processing and graphics. But today, Commodore users turn their lazy sailboats into swift battleships. You'll excuse the techno-jargon example of Rear Admiral Jim Brains who reports, "A fully configured machine comes with 16MB of RAM, a 4-Gig SCSI hard drive, a 230kbps UART, can do 33.6kbps modem and fax, connects to an HP color laser, runs at 20MHz and can do six or more channels of

sound." He also reports through the FAQs on his Web site that some barnacled souls are experimenting with TCP/IP stacks and multitasking kernels. Multitasking? On a 64? Sounds like a fish story to me. But it's true, and they're succeeding.

For you landlubbers, this means that the Commodore can still battle the best of today's computers at nearly any task. Run a business. Play a huge game. Word process. Make music. And if you're one of the smart, unlucky or doomed people who traded your sea legs for solid ground and gave up your Commodore, the C64 is the most emulated computer on the Internet.

LOAD: BASKING IN SIR CLIVE'S AMAZING TECHNICOLOR SHADOW.

Quick quiz for United States computer fans: What computer started the United Kingdom's home computing industry? No! Not Atari. Sinclair. In fact, many U.S. computer fans will give a look of horror at the mention of the little Timex computer cowering under the C64 and Apple II giants. The Sinclair didn't do very well over here. Across the ocean, however, it was Apple and Commodore that trembled at Sinclair's footfalls. "In the U.K. and some other European countries it was more popular than the Commodore 64 because it was cheaper by about $100," says Ben Baylis, Sinclair connoisseur. Today, the shadow of Sinclair reaches internationally through the Internet and its community is tight.

Damian Burke, who's enamored of the color version of the Sinclair, the Spectrum (or Speccy), lauds its games and programming ease. "It was cheaper than other computers and had faster and more reliable tape loading," he says. "A lot of current programmers learned the trade on their 8-bit machines."

Just like the rest of these so-called "obsolete computers," the Sinclair is pulled in unnatural directions, but by international hands. Russians put hard drives and filing systems on the Spectrum. Polish factories make replacements for the Sinclair's membrane keyboards. Users around the world type and distribute the old manuals. There's much fondness for these computers in the tiny cases, and users get a gleam in their eyes at the mention of old programmers.

Of course, there's only one reason to perform the backflips that keep a Sinclair alive: games. "Forget Mario and Sonic, try Head Over Heels or Spindizzy," says Baylis. So Sinclair and Spectrum fans write programs that transfer software from the Internet to their Sinclairs, and emulators give other computer users the chance to experience Sinclair ecstasy—which is said to be darn close to multiple orgasms.

Sir Clive Sinclair, the company's founder, is off creating new industries, his interest in computers just about extinguished. But his robust computers survive. This tall tale from Baylis proves it: "Drop a Sinclair out of a window, it will bounce and still work. Drop a Commodore 64 from the same window and count the pieces. I wonder if it is bulletproof?"

LOAD: OTHER SYSTEMS NOT FORGOTTEN.

Of course, there are many other systems we should never forget.

The TI-99/4a was pulled off the market in 1983. Its users write emulators and expand those limited systems despite legal harrumphs from Texas Instruments. **w3.gwis.com/~polivka/994apg.html**

The Coleco Adam, the child of the ColecoVision, lives on at AdamCon and through essays titled, "The Future of The Adam" (**www.csclub.uwaterloo.ca/u/dmwick/adam.html).** A lot of work for a computer that's about dead.

The games and multi-DOS systerms of the TRS-80 and CoCos also live on. And, of course, Radio Shack bashing never ends. **www.sfn.saskatoon.sk.ca/~ab594/coco.html**

Speak their names with great respect.

LOAD: DORMANT ENERGIES.

When we contacted psychologists to ask why people are interested in old technologies we were told, "I'm sorry. The doctor is playing Quake right now. Care to leave a message?"

So, we'll talk to James Hague, an 8-bit doctor. Hague knows that behind those systems and software were brilliant pioneers who made '80s computers magic, unlike the conformist systems of today. Over the last few years, Hague has tracked down those old 8-bit magicians and interviewed them. He will hang up his findings for all to see in his new electronic book, *Halcyon Days*. "These days you don't hear much about individuals, unless they're CEOs or industry analysts," he says. "But little worlds have sprung up around old machines, and the names have meaning again. If you wrote an article or a decent program, people knew you."

Worlds have indeed sprung up around these systems, fabulous planets with fire in the hearts of their inhabitants. These planets revolve around a star—a favorite old computer system. The inhabitants travel into the star and strike hot its dormant energies, building new rockets and ships to hurtle through the cold space of obsolescence. All this to prove they can rejoin modern computing. All this to prove their love of computers.

BACK FROM THE GRAVE:

SITES THAT CELEBRATE THE REINCARNATIONS OF SYSTEMS ONCE LEFT FOR DEAD.

PETER LEITHEN'S APPLE][FOREVER W/ LINKS TO EMULATORS
www.globaldialog.com/~pliethenapple2/index.html

APPLE 8-BIT: FAQ
www.visi.com/~nathan/a2/faq/csa2.html

THE APPLE RETROSPECTIVE
www.photonpub.co.uk/appleretro/

ATARI 8-BIT EMULATORS
zippy.sonoma.edu/~kendrick/nbs/new_and_emu.html

CENTRAL ATARI INFORMATION NETWORK
(Now defunct, but worth the trip for the tear-jerking story "Did you hear anyone say Goodbye?" Weep.)
ace.cs.ohiou.edu/personal/mleair/cain.html

JIM BRAIN'S US COMMODORE WEB SITE
www.msen.com/~brain/cbmhome.html

JIM BRAIN'S CABOOM! A COMMODORE SEARCH ENGINE
www.jbrain.com/caboom/

MEGA-LIST OF LINKS AND EMULATORS
www.student.nada.kth.se/~d93-alo/c64/links.html

JETMAN'S SPECCY NOSTALGIA TRIP
www.jetman.demon.co.uk/speccy/index.html

BEN BAYLIS' SINCLAIR PAGE
www.cs.ucl.ac.uk/students/zcacbb1/zcacbb1.html

The Open Road Beckons, but Before You Step Out the Door, Explore the Vast Travel Resources Available on the Web

HIT the N

ummer's almost here and the time is right for, well, getting away from it all. If you're about to wrap up a grueling year at the academy or have been putting in too many hours hacking away at work, summer is the time to hang it up and kick it back for a while.

But you know what they say: When you have the money to travel, you don't have the time and vice versa. Well, that's no longer true. Today, thanks to the Internet, savvy adventurers can travel to distant lands for less than ever, and even find ways to stay there on the cheap.

Beyond helping travelers save money, the Net is helping people travel with better, more up-to-date information. And it's helping them stay in touch with friends and family while they travel, which can also ease the budget—it's much cheaper to send e-mail than to try to connect by phone.

But enough jabbering—you're itching to hit the road, so let's get started.

COMPILING YOUR OWN CUSTOM GUIDEBOOK

Rather than going to a bookstore and buying a guidebook filled mostly with information you'll never use, why not use the Net to compile a personal guidebook? If you know where you want to go and are interested in some suggestions about what to see, try Fodor's Personal Trip Planner (**www.fodors.com**). Say you want to go to Santa Fe, N.M. Select the city from a list, click through categories like Where to Stay and Eating Out, then hit Create My Miniguide. You'll have a custom guide to Santa Fe, based on your interests.

If you want the Net's help in picking your next vacation spot, try Conde Nast's Concierge (**travel.epicurious.com/traveler/concierge/concierge.html**). You put in your interests, what you can afford and when you want to travel. Based on these and other preferences, the Concierge will offer a few suggestions for where to spend your vacation. For example, I told the Concierge that I'd like to go to Southeast Asia in June and that I prefer a temperature range of 70-85 degrees. In a few seconds the Concierge responded that Bali would be an ideal choice and suggested a list of hotels in my budget. While you may not want to let a robot dictate your vacation plans, the Concierge is a good place to get ideas for your next trip.

Another superb site for destination information is excite's city.net (**city.net**). Click on the world map on the cover page to get to the country you're planning on visiting. When Lisa Johnson of San Diego learned she'd have to go to Bergen, Norway, on business, she had only a week to learn about the city and plan activities for her days off there. So she turned to city.net, where she found a wealth of information on Bergen and western Norway. Said her husband John: "No doubt right now she's on a fjord cruise using the information we pulled off city.net's page on Bergen tours. She's planning to take the 'Norway in a Nutshell' tour we got from city.net. Without the Net, there's no way we could have done in-depth research on such short notice, and it saved us the cost of a $20 Fodor's book that has more detail than we wanted."

Some established guidebook companies have made the jump to the Web, and millions of travelers are flocking to these sites before taking off on their trips. Lonely Planet (**www.lonelyplanet.com/**) and The Rough Guides (**www.hotwired.com/rough/**), two guidebook companies that budget travelers have relied on for years, are among the best. These sites offer a tremendous amount of information, to the point where many travelers may opt to save a few bucks by printing out the information they need rather than buying the guidebook.

Richard Trillo of The Rough Guides doesn't believe the RG site, which includes the full text of some of RG's titles, will hurt sales. "Why would anyone want sheaves of

by Michael Shapiro

Hit the ROAD

Net BEFORE YOU

computer printouts stapled together when they can get the beautiful book? Long live the book." Despite Trillo's faith in hard copy, many travelers (like the Johnsons, mentioned above) are already cherry-picking the best information from online sites. Others buy the book and supplement it with printouts from the Net.

GETTING THERE CHEAPLY

OK, now you know where you're going and want to get there as cheaply as possible. In the old days, you could hang out at an airport hoping to get a cheap standby ticket. Unfortunately, those days are over, but by using the Net effectively, you can save a bundle on air travel.

For a quick getaway, consider last-minute discount fares like Net SAAver fares from American Airlines (**www.americanair.com**). Each Wednesday, American sends out dozens of eleventh-hour deals to cities in the U.S. and abroad. Typically, the domestic trips must begin the following Friday evening or Saturday and return anytime the following Monday or Tuesday.

Note: You can learn about Net SAAver fares at American's site or by subscribing to the Net SAAver weekly e-mail newsletter—see the site for details about subscribing.

Fares are typically less than half of standard low fares; witness a round-trip fare of $129 for travel between Chicago and Boston. During off-peak travel seasons, Net SAAver offers package deals on international routes like a six-day, five-night trip to London, including airfare, a first-class hotel, and breakfast each day, for $499. Other airlines, such as USAir (**www.usair.com**), have similar programs. To save money on hotels, see Click-It! Weekends (**www.travelweb.com**) where similar last-minute deals are offered at Hyatt and other stylish hotels.

But not everyone can take off at the last minute. To find air schedules and prices, see Expedia (**expedia.com**) or another major online booking service. Put in your travel dates and times, and Expedia will list your options. Then click on

illustration by Warren Linn

Best Fare Finder to search for the best fare on that route. To keep tabs on the best fares to the places you'd like to travel, sign up with Expedia's Fare Tracker and tell it which three routes you'd like updates on. For example, if you live in Seattle, type in Seattle-San Francisco, Seattle-Los Angeles, and Seattle-New York. Each week, Fare Tracker will send e-mail updates on the cheapest fares for each route.

For international air travel, the best bet is finding a consolidator. Sites such as Flifo (**www.flifo.com**) and TISS (**www.tiss.com**) have consolidator fares, but no site has them all. These fares are special discounted fares, offered "under the table," and cannot be included in the major computer reservation systems. They're perfectly legitimate, but the Net isn't always the best place to find them. Try the Sunday travel section of a good metro newspaper or a travel agent who's well connected with consolidators.

But don't overlook sites that can save you money on international travel. Cathay Pacific (**www.cathay-usa.com**), for example, has periodic auctions through its Web site, offering tickets to the highest bidders. Cathay is planning to auction another 1,000 tickets this year, having staged three successful auctions last year. During last summer's auction, some of the winning bidders flew round-trip from New York or Hong Kong for under $800. Cathay encourages visitors to sign up for its Cybertraveler program, and occasionally sends e-mail updates offering special deals to these Cybertravelers. These deals have been challenged as discriminatory against those who don't own a computer, but so far, none of the challenges have succeeded. Other airlines have similar programs. For a list of links to hundreds of airlines, see Airlines of the Web (**www.itn.net/airlines**).

Finally, for ultracheap—or even free—international travel, consider flying as an air courier. Here's how it works: you give up your baggage allowance and travel with a carry-on bag. A rep from an air courier company meets you at the airport, checks in baggage under your name, and gives you your tix. Sometimes you have to meet a rep at the other end to release the bags, then you're free to go. Typically, you can stay up to 14 or 30 days, depending on the deal you work out with the courier company. To find out about courier deals online, see Air Courier Travel (**www.courier.org**) or the Worldwide Courier Association (**www.wallstech.com**), probably the only budget travel site with a video clip of Robin Leach.

Sang Kwon, a student who flew to Thailand on a courier deal, found out about courier flights through a Yahoo! search, but wasn't sure at first if the fares were legit. "After seeing examples of some of the fares being offered, I truly thought it was a scam. So I investigated a bit more and found several articles written by netizens and travel publications concerning air courier services. I was thoroughly satisfied with my flight, especially knowing I paid less than half what everyone else on the plane paid for the very same flight."

THE PERSONAL CONNECTION

As seasoned Net-users know, the Net is much more than the World Wide Web. While the Web is wonderful, it's pretty much a one-way medium. Sure, some Web sites have nice conference areas (Lonely Planet's Traveling Companions [**www.lonelyplanet.com/feedback/comp.htm**] is among the best for hooking up with other adventurers), but the Web isn't the best place to get opinions from other travelers. Newsgroups and listservs are.

There are newsgroups out there for just about any interest. And thankfully, you don't have to wade through the thousands of groups to look for the right one. Just go to the Web site DejaNews (**www.dejanews.com**), where you can put in your key words—for example, "camping AND Maine"—and get back a list of newsgroups where you can find out about camping in Maine. Then read the articles or post some questions of your own, and if you're specific and polite, you should hear back from fellow travelers.

When Ami Claxton wanted information about hotels in Rome, she first did some research on the

Schmooze Usenet for a Spot to Crash

Most stories about online travel focus on the latest innovations on Web sites. While some of the new technology is phenomenal, the one-to-one connection that's possible through newsgroups, listservs and conference areas is still among the best "tools" on the Net.

Consider the story of Dave Hatunen, an engineer who lives just south of San Francisco. For a trip to Europe with his wife and young daughter, he used Web sites to find out about flights, Eurail passes, even ferry schedules. Then he turned to newsgroups and arranged to stay with people he met over the Net, saving a bundle on hotel costs while enriching his trip with the personal exchange that comes from staying in a local family's home.

"I used Travelocity (**www.travelocity.com**) to find the cheapest non-stop flight at the time we wanted. I limited the search to only non-stops, found one on British Airways that was perfect and made the reservation online.

"Next, we needed to get a Eurail pass for the three of us. Through the Eurail site (**www.eurail.com**) we found a special family pass that allowed the three of us to travel together on the same pass.

"I also found information about the ferry from Stockholm to Helsinki—though the site was in Swedish, I could figure out the schedule. So now I know when we have to be in Stockholm to make the ferry. By checking out train schedules, I found that on our train trip from Stockholm to Copenhagen, we'd have to change trains in Hasselholm and we'd have only 20 minutes to do it. I asked my wife if she thinks she'll be able to pack light enough for us to make it. We know we'll have to rush—that's good to know ahead of time."

While researching this trip, Dave discovered relatives in Finland he didn't know he had. The news came through someone he met in a Usenet discussion group.

"The amazing thing is that we're going to be gone three weeks, and thanks to the connections we've made on the Net, we're not going to have to stay in a hotel one night.

"We have friends in London that I met through a science newsgroup on the Net. The husband of this family had seen some of my posts to this group, and when he was getting ready to visit California, he sent me some e-mail to let me know he'd be coming. So I invited him to the house and we hit it off famously. Each time he came to California, he would visit, and finally he brought his wife and three kids and they all stayed at our house.

"Now it's our turn to spend some time with them in England. We'll be staying with them for three days on our way up to Finland and five days on the way back.

"And when we get to Finland, we'll meet some second cousins that I didn't know I had. Someone in Finland saw my last name when I posted to a newsgroup and this person knew a Harri Hatunen at the University of Oulu (Finland). So he sent e-mail to Harri, and Harri got in touch with me. We went up the family tree and figured out that we're second cousins. So of course when they heard we were planning to visit Finland, they invited us to stay with them.

"We (my family in the U.S.) never knew exactly where we came from. My grandfather had Alzheimer's, and even before that, he didn't say much about the family history. But through these relatives we've been able to map our family tree."

What's remarkable about the connections Dave made is that he didn't have to go out of his way to make them. They were all made from the comfort of his home—using his personal computer. Dave managed to meet people half a world away who later visited him in California and reciprocated by inviting Dave's family to stay with them.

Web, then turned to the newsgroup **rec.travel.europe** asking for comments about the hotels she was considering. Ami received about 20 e-mail messages from all over the world, mostly from people who had recently been to Rome. And many who responded offered tips about what to see and do while there. "The Usenet community is a fabulous source of information," she says. "Very often, people who wrote had just returned within the past month, so that the information was timely and relevant. It's also much cheaper than buying a guidebook or making international phone calls to people who may not speak English. These are just regular people (most times) who are trying to help you enjoy your experience. They have no financial stake in where you stay or visit."

But don't take opinions off Usenet as gospel. Somebody might like a place that doesn't suit you, or a proprietor of a cheap hotel could make it sound like a palace. So look for patterns, as Claxton did, basing her choice on several recommendations for the same hotel. Once she selected the hotel, she used e-mail to negotiate a discount. "Here are some reasons to give us a lower price," she wrote in her message. "We found you on the Web; we will stay for six nights during low tourist season; we are staying over a weekend; and we are very nice!" After going back and forth a couple of times, the hotel agreed to knock more than 20 percent off the rate previously quoted.

THE NET AS LIFELINE

When you're on the road, especially on a long trip, the Net can be a virtual lifeline, offering updated travel information and keeping you connected with other travelers. When Jim Klima decided to travel through Africa and Asia, he turned to the Net's newsgroups and listservs (e-mail lists) for advice.

"Before leaving, I prowled every travel-related discussion group I could find to locate people who had actually done an overland trip," Klima said. "Since few Americans travel this way, using the Net gave me access to Europeans and Australians who had firsthand experience. I received very good feedback, both negative and positive, about overlanding in general and specific (trucking) companies in particular. It also gave me a splendid opportunity to query these people about what equipment and precautions I should take."

Note: To find listservs, see Liszt (**www.liszt.com**) where you can find listservs that match your interests.

Once on the road, Klima used e-mail to get key information for his journey. "We used e-mail to ask Lonely Planet about release dates for new editions of the guidebooks for Pakistan and Central Asia and who the local distributors were in Nairobi and Islamabad. We got both in Nairobi, which really saved our butts—going into these areas blind would have been much more difficult."

When Klima and his wife became ill in India, they used e-mail to keep friends and family abreast of their return plans "which evolved as our illnesses did." Calling from India would have been expensive and impractical, he said, so they found a little long-distance shop that sent e-mail for 60 rupees (just under $2 a page).

As Klima and many others have found, the Net can be a great way to save some money. But the benefits extend far beyond finding good deals. Through online resources, travelers are finding they can get just the information they want, hear honest opinions from other travelers and stay in touch with the home front more easily. And they're finding that planning their trips, from finding rail schedules to getting advice about hostels, can be almost as enjoyable as the trip itself.

21 Great Travel Sites for Enhancing Your Trips

Webcrawler Travel
webcrawler.com/select/trav.new.html
A great place to start, with links to the best travel sites, organized by region and subject.

Great Outdoor Recreation Pages (GORP)
www.gorp.com
A bible for those who love the outdoors.

CultureFinder
www.culturefinder.com
Type in the name of your destination and the dates you'll be there, and this site will deliver a list of events, including art exhibits, operas, plays and classical music performances.

Preview Travel
www.reservations.com
Airline schedules, reservations and destination information.

Round-The-World Travel Guide
www.solutions.net/rec-travel/rtw/html/faq.html
Key advice for long-term travelers, such as how to find work and how to stay in touch with the home front.

Around-the-World Airfare Builder
www.highadv.com
Dozens of possible RTW routes and fares, with some under $1,500.

Flyte Trax
www.amerwxcncpt.com/FlyteTrax/
This site can tell you when a flight that's

in the air is due to arrive—it even shows a map pinpointing the current location of your flight.

TravelWeb
www.travelweb.com
Search or browse through thousands of listings of hotels around the world.

MapQuest
www.mapquest.com
Zoom in on your destination for directions, local hotels, restaurants and more.

Cyberspace World Railroad
www.mcs.com/~dsdawdy/cyberoad.html
Worldwide timetables and information.

Subway Navigator
metro.jussieu.fr:10001/bin/cities/english
Information, directions and maps for 60 metro train and subway systems in 29 countries.

Travlang's Foreign Languages for Travelers
www.travlang.com/languages/
Click on the language you need to learn and select from categories like "Basic Words," "Directions" or "Times and Dates."

The Internet Guide to Hosteling
www.hostels.com
Thousands of hostels around the world, a hosteling FAQ, a conferencing area

where you can ask questions or share your experiences, and reviews of budget guidebooks.

Staying Healthy in Asia, Africa and Latin America
www.moon.com/staying.healthy/travel.health.html
Includes the full text of Moon's book by the same name and has a feature that lets travelers search for a specific disease or region.

World Guide to Vegetarianism
www.veg.org/veg/Guide/index.html
An indispensable guide for vegetarians.

No S—tting in the Toilet
www.magna.com.au/~nglobe/nsitt/contents.html

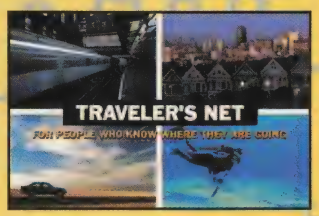
An irreverent look at the inevitable hardships of real-world travel.

Arthur Frommer's Outspoken Encyclopedia of Travel
www.frommer.com
"Secret" deals uncovered by the world's leading travel guidebook writer.

Shoestring Travel
www.stratpub.com/
Where budget travelers trade tips to help one another save money.

Budget Travel
www.budgettravel.com/
Reams of listings for cheap flights around the world.

Interactive Travel Guide
www.developnet.com/travel/
This site started as "Clever Ways to Travel for Free or Little Cost," and while the site has broadened its focus, it's still a good source for bargains—for example, tips on where to change money in Europe or how to get a driveaway vehicle.



Traveler's Net
www.travelersnet.com
Cut out the middleman and save up to 7 percent on airfares and other travel arrangements.

Kitsching a Ride

by Steve Knopper

If you're planning a road trip anytime soon, please consider a visit to some of these neglected, lesser attractions. Sure, they're mostly run by backroad bumpkins or oddball freaks—but, hey, they all have a Net presence, and we think that's pretty darn cool.

Corn Palace, Mitchell, S.D.
www.dwu.edu/mitchell/attract.htm

If it weren't so close to the most ridiculous monument in American history (Mt. Rushmore: four giant heads on a hill!), this excellently stupid building would be way more famous. Corn cobs of all different colors, shapes and sizes decorate the entire exterior, and employees rearrange the cobs periodically. The Mitchell-run tourist Web page is full of breathtaking facts (for instance: the Corn Palace was built in 1892 to prove the fertility of South Dakota soil).

World's Largest Ball of Twine, Cawker City, Kan.
skyways.lib.ks.us/kansas/towns/Cawker/twine.html

Yet another city tourism Web page with great facts—the Ball weighs 16,462 pounds, is 40 feet in circumference and was inaugurated in 1953 by farmer Frank Stoeber, who gave it to Cawker City before passing away at age 74. The site includes directions, but advises you not to sweat 'em because "after all, this is a small town and a big ball of twine."

Museum of Questionable Medical Devices, Minneapolis, Minn.
www.mtn.org/~quack/

This page highlights a scary picture of a machine that once promised to increase virility and cure prostate problems. The museum, located in an out-of-the-way shopping mall that's pretty hard for visitors to find, is worth the price of admission just for the foot-powered breast enlarger and soap that claimed to "suds" off pounds.

Wall Drug, Wall, S.D.
www.state.sd.us/state/executive/tourism/20reason/wall.htm

For travelers driving southeast from South Dakota's beautiful Badlands, the 66-year-old Wall Drug sneaks up on you. It's a bizarre, wooden old Western-style town full of the best kitsch you'll ever see including, an 80-foot dinosaur. (*Pee-wee's Big Adventure*, anyone?) and a giant jackalope (apparently stolen from Douglas, Wyo., the Jackalope capital of the world).

Frog Capital of the World, Rayne, La.
www.lsue.edu/acadgate/rayne.htm

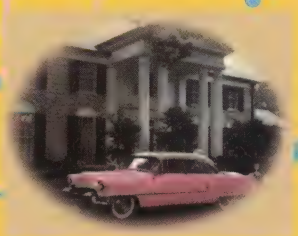
It's unclear exactly why Rayne, La. is the frog capital of the world, although it's conveniently located near several swamps just outside of New Orleans. A small, brown sign at the local McDonald's is all that marks this tiny town's claim to fame. Visitors to the Frog Capital of the World might miss its claim to fame altogether unless they see this site (or unless their stays happen to coincide with the annual September Frog Festival).

Circus World Museum, Baraboo, Wis.
www.next-wave.net/nextwave/cwmpix.htm

A boring site, but worth a cybertrip for pictures of clowns Mr. Bill and Happy. And worth a real trip for all the big shoes.

Graceland, Memphis, Tenn.
www.elvis-presley.com

On the Web, this is the definitive Elvis Presley site—the "Elvisology" section is packed with trivia, movie facts and record-sales statistics. (And a moving eulogy for Uncle Vester Presley, a Graceland security guard who died of pneumonia at 83 in January.) In real life, it's the ultimate Americana road-trip destination because it's as kitschy as Wall Drug and as solemn as Arlington Cemetery. You can walk in and enjoy the King's Astroturf-colored, multi-televisioned Jungle Room. You can also reflect on Elvis' tragic heroism and the fact that he really was once an astounding talent who changed the world of music.



Trees of Mystery, northern California
www.northcoast.com/~tofm/
Walk the Trail of Tall Tales for an exasperating tour of Paul Bunyan mythology. (Like we need more information about Paul Bunyan—he was big, he had a blue ox, end of story. Why is everybody so obsessed with this guy?) The trees, near as we can tell, grow in cool, contorted shapes.

Dollywood, Gatlinburg, Tenn.
www.dollywood.com/
www.spotweb.com/webspot/dollywood.html
The site corresponding to country singer Dolly Parton's real-life amusement park has a "Coming soon..." tag. While you're waiting, check out some random Net surfer's quick and sarcastic reporting from Dollywood. The park admission is $23.99, which we're told includes loads of "Dolly Dollars."

Liberace Museum, Las Vegas, Nev.
www.geocities.com/WestHollywood/1709/museum.html
We're betting that the words "Click on the candelabra to continue" turn up nowhere else on the Web. Lacking the solemnity of Graceland, this paraphernalia-packed monument to Mr. Showmanship, who died in 1987, captures the heart of Las Vegas. If that's what you're looking for.

Roy Rogers and Dale Evans Museum, Victorville, Calif.
www.royrogers.com
"Notice: Due to circumstances beyond our control, the 'Roy Rogers—King of the Internet Cowboys' mousepads have been delayed indefinitely." Need we say more?

Jack Daniel Distillery, Lynchburg, Tenn.
www.jackdaniels.com
Most people will be able to access this electronic trove of whiskey trivia with no problem. This writer, however, is ashamed to say that his old, slow Mac Classic II made it awfully difficult to load the site. So he hit the road, Jack.

Parrot Jungle and Museum, Miami, Fla.
www.florida.com/parrotjungle/map.htm
More parrots than Rayne, La. has frogs. Is that a plus?

National Cowboy Hall of Fame, Oklahoma City, Okla.
www.okccvb.org/cowboy.html
Yeeha. Sorry, couldn't get that excited about this site. Saddles, trophies, lassoes, murals and a 33-foot bronze statue of William F. "Buffalo Bill" Cody.

GENERAL ROAD TRIP SITES

Roadside America
www.roadsideamerica.com
"The New Roadside America" (Fireside/Simon and Schuster, $13), the ultimate book for people into oddball Americana, has a broad Web presence. Its multipaged site contains some of the only Internet mentions (according to AltaVista, anyhow) of monuments like the World's Tallest Crucifix (two metal poles strung together in Bardsville, Ky.). A number of fun interactive tours and some places to share your own thoughts.

USA Centric
www.webedelic.com/usacentric.html
Similar to Roadside America, the site maintains info on some great hokey locations.

Road Trips!
www.alka-seltzer.com/dev/alka/food/foodroad.html
Some Alka-Seltzer employee's blurbs about weird vacations he took. Includes a picture of "Dick's Toe Repair," a place where foot doctors allegedly make house calls. There's nothing else about it anywhere on the Web.

UNCLE IRA (LEFT)
AND DARK TANGENT

down on the farm

HACKER DARK TANGENT TAKES A TRIP TO UNCLE IRA'S FUN FARM O' DEATH, A PLACE WHERE TECHNOLOGICAL ODDITIES AND GOVERNMENT SURPLUS FIND NEW LIFE

It all started with a confused message on my machine: "He's got Bionic Man reel-to-reel tape units five feet tall with a SCSI-1 interface! Want to set your watch? There's a GPS clock over the TV satellite phone in the back, battlefield perimeter alarms, X-ray machines, phone switches, blargaahhh..." This message was just one of many that began pouring into DEF CON world domination headquarters not long ago, detailing a hidden outpost on the outskirts of Seattle. This outpost, known to some as Uncle Ira's Fun Farm O' Death (FOD), houses loads of cool technological gizmos and government surplus hi-wizardry that would turn even the head of a Cult of the Dead Cow cyberninja strike force.

After learning about the Fun Farm O' Death, I quickly contacted some cohorts to obtain directions. The following is a composite of many return visits to FOD. What I found there was astounding.

THE SETTING

Just *finding* the farm is a tough task. Getting there means a long ride through the peaceful farmland east of Bothell, Wash. Every time I drive there I'm amazed by the fact that this concealed Brigadoon of cool toys and technology exists; I can't help but laugh when I think of how difficult it must have been to transport things like the five 7-foot cabinets of the System 85 phone switch so far from the nearest post office.

Picture an ordinary-looking farmhouse, perhaps slightly run-down, that's positioned next to a barn and another smaller building. There are several cars parked adjacent to the barn, as well as several large trucks that appear to be used for hauling "large things." Behind one of the buildings, there's an Inmarsat Sat Phone. On the porch of the house, there's a USSB satellite dish. Littering the backyard are numerous military-like transport crates, and in the pasture behind the barn there are two horses.

UNCLE IRA: TECHNO-PIMP

The proprietor of this strange place doesn't refer to it as the Fun Farm O' Death. Instead, it's called Meco, or Moser Electronics Company.

Uncle Ira, a true techno-pimp, owns the farm and has been collecting, repairing and selling data communications equipment since 1980, when he was in high school. This interest continued through his college years, and now his sometime hobby has turned into a full-time job. The guy is impassioned about his work—his business card even has an RS-232 chart printed on the back—useful for when one needs to remember that pins four and five on the modem cable are Request

to Send (RTS) and Clear to Send (CTS). Don't see the usefulness? Good.

At about six feet tall, with glasses, a clean-cut beard and a bit of a paunch, Uncle Ira can consume more info than Liz Taylor can food at a champagne buffet. Need to understand 16 frequency QSM? Need an answer on how to make your passive fiber FL hub active? Who starred in the movie *Colossus: The Forbin Project*? How much money did Boeing lose trying to sell the Saudis the Peace Shield system for air defense? Ask Ira. Even at 1 a.m., when I need to know what version of Solaris works with a Sun 410, I ring Uncle Ira for a turbo answer.

Apparently, Uncle Ira has customers the world over, techno-pimps similarly crazed about data communications gear and computing odds and ends. Just as the computer underground has its multitudinous factions of whacked zealots, so does the world of used electronic equipment buyers and sellers.

Some of Uncle Ira's customers have rather specific fetishes. Uncle Ira describes one as a time freak; he just loves time and purchases every conceivable type of clock. When Uncle Ira gets his hands on a few atomic clocks (which use rubidium instead of cesium because it has a more stable time base), then bam!—they're shipped off to the time freak in, count 'em, milliseconds! Datum 9390 GPS time clocks? Pow! Off to the time freak! Airport X-ray machines? Zammo! Off to the terrorist—er, the guy who likes to salvage the light intensifier tubes! Over the years, Uncle Ira has learned who will buy what and at what price. Often, he'll just sell or trade shiny, cool-looking goods to other used equipment dealers, as a sort of swap. Except in this instance, phone switches are being exchanged instead of baseball cards.

THE TECHNOPIMP VS. THE MAN

When it comes to acquiring cool technological commodities, there are several resources available to the buyer: the government, industry and private parties. Obviously, most of the really cool hi-tech gear comes from the government (referred to from here on out as the man). You must remember, the man is easily confused. Because the man's policies for getting rid of cool stuff are all screwed up, it's rather easy for world-domination-hungry computer network troublemakers to get their paws on said gear. There are two main agencies from which to purchase computer-related equipment: The Department of Defense's DRMS (Defense Reutilization and Marketing Service) and the GSA (General Services Administration). The DRMS offers the buyer mostly military surplus stuff, some of it over 30 years old. The GSA manages all other non-Department of Defense government agency property, primarily computers and related office equipment.

The DRMS enforces hundreds of strange rules on what equipment must be destroyed and what can survive to see the light of another day. Unfortunately, computer and communications gear that was fine to sell two years ago has suddenly found itself tracked in databases, wrapped tightly in red tape and targeted for decommission (in other words, destroyed). The DRMS is decommissioning 25-year-old tube radios; the GSA, on the other hand, has no such regulation on old tube radios, and sells them to the public, a typical example of government contradiction. Confusing matters more about what can be bought and sold, private industry is bound by few prescripts, if any—Boeing, IBM and other large government contractors routinely rid themselves of Tempest-rated computers (heavily shielded equipment that prevents adversaries from remotely monitoring your screen) that the DRMS would otherwise destroy.

As a sidenote, the Department of Motor Vehicles has an even more ridiculous decommissioning process. Want to buy a "Humm-Vee" jeep to drive around town? Not a chance, thanks to current regulations that require Humm-Vees to be destroyed. It used to be that the outlawed vehicles merely had to be cut into two pieces to be decommissioned. But because people were welding them back together, new decommissioning laws now apply. Humm-Vees have to be: A) crushed and compacted, B) driven over by a tank or C) cut into four pieces, corner to corner, by a cutting tool that displaces no less than a half inch of material. Why, you ask? Because the Humm-Vee doesn't meet current federal safety standards: it doesn't have a padded dashboard or a "neutral" position on the gear box! To the half-wits at the DMV, it's better to spend more money crushing the vehicle with a tank than it would take to install

FOD is a place that the human mind isn't capable of imaging with words alone. Seeing is believing. Even then, it's difficult to comprehend.

THE AUTHOR DISPLAYS THE WARES AT UNCLE IRA'S FUN FARM O' DEATH

some padding. And this is how the government operates with regard to cool computer gear.

So Uncle Ira has had to learn all of the how-tos on bidding and purchasing items he wants to adopt for the Fun Farm O' Death. Problem is, the various agencies and companies that use these auctions as trash disposals force buyers to purchase goods en masse. If you want that 386 PC with the 1 gig drive, you'll also have to buy the three pallets of printer sound hoods. The auctioneers seed one box of good stuff with 10 boxes of partially assembled wiring harnesses and pillows—just so that they can clear out their warehouses. Some universities sell off their equipment, but take the printed manuals and operating instructions and recycle them separately. A total nightmare for Uncle Ira.

Also, buying a computer with a hard drive means taking a gamble that it even still works. No money-back guarantees. Some large companies will de-gauss the hard drives in order to wipe them of data; this also makes the drives unusable. Some places just trash the workstation drives, but don't touch the servers. And sometimes auctioneers sell tape backups with data still on them.

On the flip side, there are also times when the auctioneers' sloppiness works to Uncle Ira's advantage. He once scored a direct hit against the man when he purchased a large box of stuff that the DRMS failed to spot. They managed to crush a bunch of 30-year-old radios, but overlooked a perfectly good, one-year-old computer. Mission accomplished!

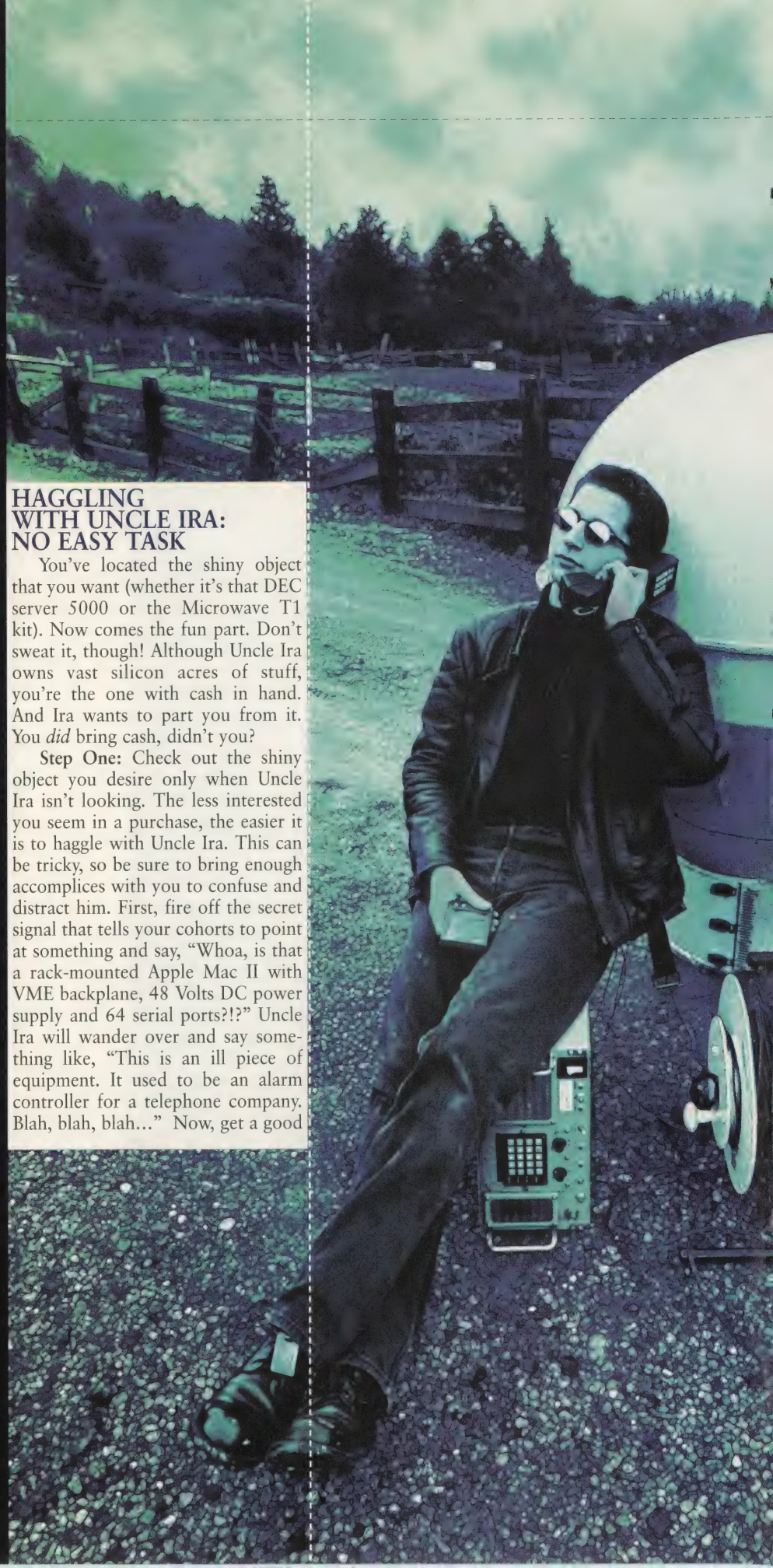
DISINTEGRATORS AND OTHER COOL DEVICES

Once Uncle Ira has scored his load of shiny stuff at an auction, he loads it into "Mad Jesus," his pickup truck with a tail lift. And off he goes to FOD. There, the random gear is sold, in a few days, a few weeks, a few years. Some stuff Ira has yet to sell: techno-junk that been residing in his barn for years, gathering dust and targeted by owl shit. (As a frequent visitor to the farm, I've had the unfortunate occasion to witness Ira and his 12-gauge ridding the barn of trespassing owls.)

When Uncle Ira really can't move certain goods, he counts on "The China Man" to make a wholesale purchase of the junk. The China Man isn't really Chinese, but bears the nickname because the final destination of Uncle Ira's unsellable equipment is either China or Taiwan. There, a hive of workers dismantles the equipment into its component parts: bolts, screws, wires, and so on. Uncle Ira sells this junk by the pound—stuff like old frame racks and cabling guts from decommissioned medical systems—to make room for newer junk in his barn.

What new stuff? It's impossible, even for Ira, to detail all of the cool techno-gear he has stashed away at the farm. When I attempt to relate the story of Ira and his funky farm to my friends and acquaintances, they usually tune out somewhere between the part about the 20 KW battlefield power turbines that run on JP4 or diesel, and the disintegrators that can eat phone books and turn them into mere dust particles. FOD is a place that the human mind isn't capable of imaging with the aid of words alone. Seeing is believing. Even then, it's difficult to comprehend.

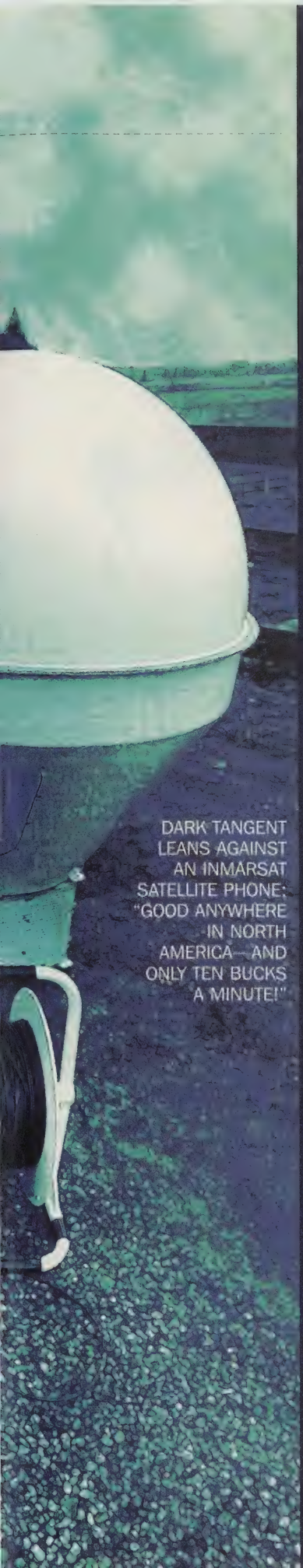
The first time I arrived at the farm, I nearly broke the bank. I wanted the datacryptor-64 DES boxes, the fiber transceivers, the rack-mount modems, the cool encrypted radios and the trunked 800 MHz police radio with computer interface. In short, I was in heaven. Everywhere I looked there was something that, with a little bit of elbow grease, could be made workable again. Fireproof filing cabinets! Zero aluminum briefcases! Even a military version of a System 85 phone switch with three hours of use! A geek's fantasy come true! Remember to breathe slowly.



HAGGLING WITH UNCLE IRA: NO EASY TASK

You've located the shiny object that you want (whether it's that DEC server 5000 or the Microwave T1 kit). Now comes the fun part. Don't sweat it, though! Although Uncle Ira owns vast silicon acres of stuff, you're the one with cash in hand. And Ira wants to part you from it. You *did* bring cash, didn't you?

Step One: Check out the shiny object you desire only when Uncle Ira isn't looking. The less interested you seem in a purchase, the easier it is to haggle with Uncle Ira. This can be tricky, so be sure to bring enough accomplices with you to confuse and distract him. First, fire off the secret signal that tells your cohorts to point at something and say, "Whoa, is that a rack-mounted Apple Mac II with VME backplane, 48 Volts DC power supply and 64 serial ports?!?" Uncle Ira will wander over and say something like, "This is an ill piece of equipment. It used to be an alarm controller for a telephone company. Blah, blah, blah..." Now, get a good



DARK TANGENT LEANS AGAINST AN INMARSAT SATELLITE PHONE: "GOOD ANYWHERE IN NORTH AMERICA—AND ONLY TEN BUCKS A MINUTE!"

look at the item you want. Does it have all of its parts? What are the serial and part numbers? Is it covered in owl poo? Soon enough, Uncle Ira will be wondering what you're up to, so be nimble, Jack!

Step Two: Feign indifference. Get a price. Say something like, "Just checking out the [fill in the blank]. How much do you want for it?" TECHNO PIMP ALERT! Never forget for even a moment that Uncle Ira is *the* Techno Pimp! He'll always respond to a price query with something like, "Umm, well, it's got these trick connectors, and I sold one back in '95 for $xxx. So, like, maybe the cost is ($xxx - $yy) = $zzz?" At this point you must refocus the conversation and respond, "OK, cool. What's this thing over here?"

Step Three: Hit the Web when you get home, call the manufacturer, find out if the shiny object is still supported or if you can receive software or an old manual for it. If so, find out what other people are selling it for. The next time you are at the Farm O' Death, implement the final phase...

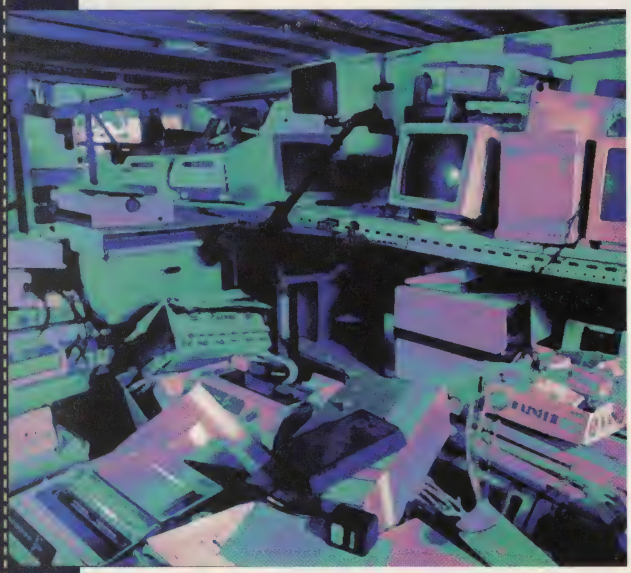
Step Four: "I was thinking about [fill in the blank]. I saw one for cheaper/better condition/less owl poo. How about $zzz - $aaa? I've got cash." If you've played your cards right, Uncle Ira will counter with, "Ow, you break my arm! You break my arm! Cash is good." It's all about the art of the deal. Uncle Ira loves to bargain.

Price is related to how much Uncle Ira knows about something, and it's also directly correlated with what I like to call the "Coolness Factor" (CF) of any given object. An example of something with a high CF would be the Sun Sparc 10 50-1 with 128megs of RAM and other extra goodies. This device has a high enough CF that Uncle Ira will set an unreasonable price for it. Most likely, it will sit on his desk until it depreciates to the price of a Happy Meal.

Also beware items with a high "luminosity." Want that terminal server? It has so many lights that when you flick the switch, a room still has more than ample reading light. Much luminosity! It's almost guaranteed to be way out of your price range. It would require ninja-like skill for anyone to pimp smack it out of Ira's possession.

In case you'd like to try:
Meco: Ira Moser, PO Box 939, Snohomish, WA 98291-0939. E-mail: ira@gte.net Phone: 206-788-0208 Fax: 360-794-8754

If you've played your cards right, Uncle Ira will counter with,



"Ow, you break my arm! You break my arm! Cash is good."

OK, OK,

A Lesson in Customs for the Net-Savvy Traveler

by Winn Schwartau

so some people think I'm a **Net Personality,** but really. I mean, really! Phil Zimmermann was under **serious investigation.** Dan Farmer made **headlines.** All I did was write a few books and **redefine war.** I mean, ***really!***

Yes, Gilligan,

First Amendm

are stepping

With a fever of 102 degrees and my nose dripping with a contagion I had acquired in Poland a few days before, I handed the customs officer my official "I'm Carrying No Illegal Drugs" form. "Anything to declare?" he asked indifferently.

"A bottle of Bulgarian Merlot," I snorted while wiping my reddened proboscis on a sweaty denim shirt sleeve. At that, he pointed me toward the darkened, most feared section of the vast customs receiving station, Secondary Inspection.

Over to the X-ray machine I trundled my ailing body, a pair of wheeled suitcases, two laptop computers, a maze of wires and telco equipment and a wide assortment of materials that were to soon be my undoing.

The month prior I had in fact cracked three ribs in an oversized London bathtub, so I had no choice but to ask the next customs man in the *"Welcome to America"* gauntlet to hoist my 60 kilo luggage for me. They stopped the X-ray conveyer belt and doubled, then tripled and then, yes, quadrupled the ion storm power bombarding my belongings—all in search of a hidden compartment hiding a golden corkscrew for the Merlot. They peered and twisted their heads to the side, and invited other inspectors to crane their necks and point at the insidiously obvious contraband I was attempting to bring into the United States.

"Tertiary Inspection," they declared, and my luggage was hoisted this time onto a long, slick aluminum tray some three feet wide that was perfectly suited to carry out bovine autopsies.

And there, waiting for me, was a snarling young peach-fuzzed customs inspector with an attitude and a gun. His hands were covered with Playtex Living gloves to protect him from any of the myriad diseases we netizens carry home with us. He had heard about boot sector viruses, obviously.

He asked and I explained what sort of work I do: Internet security, information warfare, espionage stuff. The usual from any of my books. Inspector Gilligan wouldn't give me his name or badge number, but he was chock-full of inane questions one expects from bad 1970s B-movies about spies.

"And the government lets you do that?" he quizzically asked with a Dan Quayle-like ogle-eyed stare of a deer petrified by speeding headlights.

Huh? I thought to myself and my face must have mirrored abject disbelief. "Yeah, I work for the government, too," I offered haltingly. Was this a trick question disguised behind half a bottle of red wine and non-prescription European cold medicine?

"Do you work for the Soviet Union?" he asked in all earnestness while digging through my carry-on case, pulling out stacks of file folders and bellowing "Aha!" upon discovering a book entitled, *Economic Espionage in America*. "So, do you?" he asked again.

"That would be kind of tough," I answered with my own attitude, "since they went out of business six years ago." I crossed my arms in defiance of Gilligan's job-for-life stupidity.

He poked deeper into my cache and popped out with three declassified Department of Defense reports on security. "And what about these...these...I suppose the government thinks it's okay to carry these around..." he stammered. I merely nodded. *(Hey, Inspector, what about that guy over there? Yeah, him. The one with the backpack and the AK-47 sticking out of it.)*

He held each file up and dangled it from over his head, peering inside and waiting for kilograms of white powder to come cascading out; after all, I had just come from London, England. Idiot.

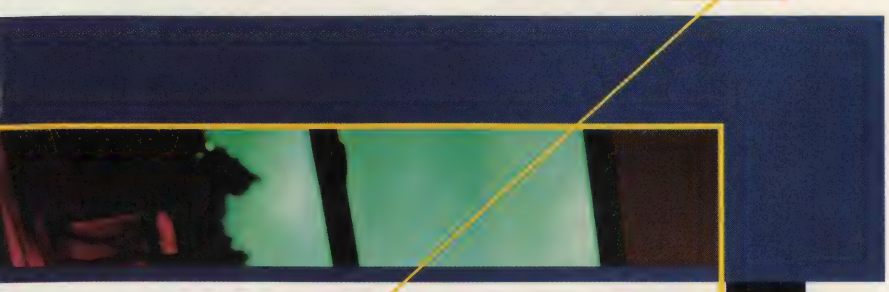
And so it went. Piece by piece. Paper by paper. And the incredulous question, too-oft repeated to be believed: "The government really lets you do this?" And my mental response, *Yes, Gilligan, there is a First Amendment and you are stepping all over it.*

He found my light reading materials and questioned my legal right to read them, or even possess them. *Weapons of Intelligence and Conflict in the Information Age*. I wrote it, yet Gilligan, here, intimated such documents represented a national security threat. *Autonomous Mobile Cyber Weapons*. He stared hard at that one. *Surviving Denial of Service on the Internet*. *The Ping of Death Page*. "And the government really lets you do this?" he droned for the umpteenth time.

He held up a single sheet of paper that had caught his eye and scanned it carefully before handing it to me. "And what's this?" A half a second later I replied as snidely as I could, "A Reuters news release," and tossed it back. *(Hey, Inspector, what about that lady—that one who's frothing at the mouth and carrying a chicken under her arm?)*

By now, a handful of other customs inspectors had gathered behind Gilligan. While he spir-

there is a



ited away a tall pile of other insidious Net-techy documents to a nearby office, one helpful inspector approached. "We tried to tell him to leave you alone, but he's new..."

"And an idiot who thinks he's caught himself the next Aldrich Ames," I added. The guy didn't disagree.

My collection of video tapes didn't go unnoticed, either. *The Hacker Attack. The Information Bomb. Hackers Breaking Into the Pentagon.* "This stuff is legal?" Gilligan chortled. "And they let you do it?"

Then it was on to my drugs. Blood pressure medicine. Aspirin. Afrin. And gobs and gobs of available-only-in-the-UK mints. "What are these for?" he demanded. "Bad breath," I said, leaning away from Gilligan to make the point. And then...then...then...then he found The Watch. It's a curious, very heavy, silver Darth Vaderish wrist watch with cantilevers and buttons and strange symbols reminiscent of those on the cover of the *Alien Coverup* book I was also carrying.

"I suppose this is a laser beam," he snorted while feeling around the contours for a button to push.

"Don't touch that!" I yelled and dove backward, cowering for fear that The Watch's gigawatt beam might instantly vaporize me. He jolted and bolted momentarily, but failed to see the humor in the situation. The inspectors behind him giggled mercilessly at his expense. *(Hey, Inspector! What about that family over there tugging that Libyan fruit tree? Don't you want to talk with them, too?)*

Now that every paper and folder and file and book and dirty sock and underwear of mine was spread along the 20-foot length of the autopsy table, Gilligan ordered, "Give me your passport." He gallumphed over to the office to process my name amongst the distant digital files of known terrorists. "Call the White House," I offered. "They know who I am."

"Don't you know that they're closed today?" Jesus, how stupid could I be? It was Sunday. Of course the government was closed.

The other inspectors merely shook their heads in embarrassment at Gilligan's shenanigans. He still refused to give me his name, but soon came a supervisory inspector who curtly handed me back my passport, said, "Thanks for your cooperation," and ushered Gilligan with a gentle shove on the tush over to the Dunce's Corner for quiet admonishment.

Now, I never did quite figure out what national secrets I was bringing into Tampa, Florida, the United States of America; nor why this particular customs inspector (whose real name I *did* eventually get) decided to spend an hour harassing me. But I did learn a lot from what the inspector didn't do.

I had two laptop computers loaded with gigs of files of infinitely more interest than my book on aliens or my copy of *Internet Underground*. Not once did Gilligan show the least interest in the best place to stash information: on a laptop emblazoned with the hacker's motto, "I ♥ Your Computer." No, no interest there.

Nor was there any recognition of a 630MB disk with almost 5,500 security tools and 70+ cryptographic programs, even though it was clearly labeled "Banned From Export Out of the United States." (No longer a crime, by the way. It is legal to carry crypto for your own personal international use.)

While in Poland, I had been given a set of a half dozen more CDs with hacking and cracking programs, security tools, crypto and God knows what else; I haven't had the chance to look yet. But one might expect the astute customs inspector to at least show a cursory interest in a set of CDs and documents *written in Polish*!

But alas, no—not our Gilligan, no.

So, for the Net-savvy traveller, or even the occasional industrial spy, a few words of advice.

Put all of the good stuff on your hard disk. The hard disk is inside a computer. They don't know that yet.

Label the computer "Contraband."

Note that Cyrillic CD-ROMs are not subject to duty. Détente is in.

Bring in several million dollars in CyberCash on a floppy disk. Taxing magnetic bytes is still a few months off.

When you come to the United States, use Tampa Airport; if you're really lucky, you'll get Gilligan to rummage through your stuff.

Be prepared to repack your own dirty clothes. That's not in their job description.

So Emmanuel Goldstein, watch out. Bernie S., you, too. And Phiber and Bloodaxe and SN and the rest of you...be careful. Remember: When you return from Heathrow Airport this summer, Gilligan will be waiting.

ent and you all over it.

by Rob Bernstein

Online Spud Gun Enthusiasts Teach Netizens About the Art of Potato, Pumpkin and Watermelon Launching

Things that go

This past year's winner of the "Punkin Chunkin" tossed a pumpkin 1,700 yards, or 5,100 feet—at just under one mile, the flying gourd landed only a few feet shy of a nearby highway. Attendees cheered as the pumpkin exploded on contact with the ground, splattering its gooey innards across the asphalt and the sides of passing vehicles.

ABOVE: THE HOLY GATLING SPUD GUN; RIGHT: A WATERMELON CANNON DISCHARGES

For the past three years, the townsfolk of Lewes, Del. have been holding the annual competition to see who can launch a pumpkin the greatest distance. Rumor has it that the contest began as a challenge between local farmers who were bragging about how far they could throw an anvil. Inexplicably, the anvil became a pumpkin, and somehow the contest of human power transformed into a battle between huge pressurized cannons, some with barrel extensions of over 100 feet in length. Yes, it's absurd, but it's also infinitely cool.

The pneumatic cannons at the Punkin Chunkin are the grandest,

Boom! !

most monstrous of the vegetable-tossing launchers that spud gun enthusiasts have been building for years. And where else would one learn and exchange information about such a device than on the Net?

Constructed from PVC tubing, the ordinary spud gun, or potato cannon, is made from a barrel, a chamber, a screw cap, an igniter and some form of propellant—usually hair spray. More modern spud guns employ pneumatics (the use of compressed air instead of propellant) to fire off spuds. But as 15-year-old potato gun enthusiast TJ Christiansen explains with terrific hurrah, "You can shoot pretty much any fruit from these things. I've tried putting arrows through the potatoes and shooting those. I shoot toilet paper."

Christiansen, who has been designing his own custom spud guns for years now, says he has learned everything there is to learn about the hobby online: the study of pressures, expanding gases and Newton's Law. What goes up must come down. Christiansen learned this the hard way after he and some friends fired a potato straight into the air. The shot was so powerful that everyone lost sight of the potato. Remembering the unfortunate incident, Christiansen recalls, "We all went running. Not expecting it to come down, it blasted me on the top of the head. I can safely say that that knocked a little sense into me. I don't shoot straight up anymore."

Jim Hammer, 41, a.k.a. Mr. Science, is also a big fan of "things that go boom." At his Web site (**www2.southwind.net/%7emrscienc/boom.html**), Hammer shows off his massive Watermelon Cannon, made from a 12" PVC sail tube, and propelled by cinnamon Glade ("It smells better than hairspray"). When he first fired the gun off in his friend Scott's basement, he was concerned "that the muzzle blast would blow the windows out of Scott's basement." Nevertheless, Hammer says they were "not nearly concerned enough to refrain from firing it." The result: a really big blast and a lot of shrapnel. Approximately six feet of the cannon blew apart into itty-bitty chunks. No one was hurt, but Hammer now focuses his attention on his more tame tomato gun (which recently blasted a hole through his garage door before splattering into tomato paste on the driveway outside).

Hammer also has been conducting experiments with oranges: "We shoot them straight up so we can time them and calibrate our computer models. We think we're getting oranges to 200 feet per second which is like 150 mph. It's fun to watch the orange go way, way up in the air and just hang there."

As dangerous as the hobby may sound, the possession and firing of spud guns is legal in most states. A letter from the Department of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms, posted on the Net by spud gun hobbyists, explains, "The Bureau has previously examined devices known as 'Spud Guns, Potato Guns or Spudzookas' and have determined that such devices, in and of themselves, are not firearms..." To be considered a firearm, a firing device has to be capable of shooting projectiles over 500 feet per second. But given some of the firepower displayed at the Punkin Chunkin Web site, at the Radical & Extreme Hobbies home page (**www.voicenet.com/~surge42/reh.htm**), it might not be too long before some of these cannons fire off projectiles at such high speeds.

BELOW: SPUD GUN ENTHUSIAST JT CHRISTIANSEN SPORTING A TOILET PAPER AND POTATO CANNON; RIGHT: MR. SCIENCE'S FRIENDS BILL AND SCOTT FIRE UP THE WATERMELON CANNON; FAR RIGHT: A LATE NIGHT TRACER ROUND FROM A TOMATO GUN

"I witnessed a test shot recently against a 1 inch thick aluminum plate. The plate rang like a bell when struck by the chicken, and chicken parts shot 50 to 80 feet into the air."

It should be noted that some local law enforcement agencies, however, have banned the use or possession of such devices; stories abound on the Net, written by disappointed spud gun lovers who explain that locals who misused the guns (by firing vegetable projectiles from moving vehicles or at one another) have caused unnecessary prohibitions of spud launching.

Despite taking a spud to the head, Christiansen believes the hobby is truly safe. Online enthusiasts agree and have posted dependable spud gun blueprints and precautions to keep newcomers from causing themselves injury. At the Spud Zone **(mason.gmu.edu/%7ewlemley/index.html)**, interested visitors are provided with the spud gun code of ethics: Always use alcohol-based propellants; do not fire guns at people, animals or moving vehicles; store the gun in a dry place; and keep the ammo in a separate location (apparently, spudzooka lovers have a sense of humor, too).

In addition to posting blueprints and safety precautions online, spud gun zealots also trade information on gun accessories and different varieties of guns that have been successfully experimented with; at his site, Christiansen details how to attach shoulder straps, sights and scopes, wheels (for big guns), shoulder rests and ram rod holders. The author of the Spud Gun Fuel Experiments Homepage **(www2.csn.net/%7ebsimon/propell.htm)** has been posting empirical information regarding different propellant formulas, including variations of methyl hydrate, white gas (camping fuel), alcohol and propane. And Hammer posts descriptions of catapults and chicken guns; "For industrial strength lobbing, it's hard to beat the chicken guns used by most of the major aircraft manufacturers to test windshields and other airplane parts which must stand up to bird strikes," writes Hammer. "I witnessed a test shot recently against a 1-inch-thick aluminum plate. The plate rang like a bell when struck by the chicken, and chicken parts shot 50 to 80 feet into the air."

As intriguing as the chicken gun display may sound, it's widely accepted among spud gunners that the Punkin Chunkin is the big daddy of all such launching sports. There, human powered devices, like catapults, rubber-band slings and bicycle-operated centrifugal throwers all make for a good pumpkin mess. The real attractions, of course, are the enormous pneumatic cannons; despite their intricacy, and incredible cost, many cannons fail to work, or only work once before self-destructing in comical fashion. "You have to be a certain person to really enjoy the massiveness of it all," laughs Scott Fichter, author of the Radical & Extreme Hobbies home page. "The power is just so out of control, it's just so out of hand. I brought a couple of friends to see the cannons and they've since lost their minds."

Uber Tubers

A Beginner's Guide to Spud Gun Sites

The 007 Spud Gun Page
members.aol.com/jboden4377/sg/sg1.htm
Bond would have loved these little gadgets.

Backyard Ballistics
www2.csn.net/%7ebsimon/backyard.html
A huge spud gun resource that makes taters of all the rest.

Can Crusher Homepage
hibp.ecse.rpi.edu/~chowm/can_crusher.html
Has nothing to do with spuds, but details a 100 micro-Farad capacitor capable of crushing cans with magnetic force. Whoa!

How To Build A Spud Cannon
darwin.web-x.com/~jcaisse/potato/
A step-by-step in potato ballistics.

The Master Potato Cannon Page
freeway.net/~reddog/index.html
The best potato cannon index online. And a triple-barrel spud gun!

The Pneumatic Cannon
www.slonet.org/%7epshuman/html/cannon.htm
Air is more powerful than fire. See why.

Potato Gun Encyclopedia
expert.cc.purdue.edu/%7ekmfdm/potatogun.html
This site sports a potato gun silencer for the discreet.

Radical & Extreme Hobbies
www.voicenet.com/~surge42/reh.htm
Kids, don't try these at home.

Things That Go Boom
www2.southwind.net/%7emrscienc/boom.html
Gallagher's schtick pales when compared to the Watermelon Cannon.

The Ultimate Home Made Cannon
home.earthlink.net/%7embgraney/cannon.html
Discover the wonders of spud gun propellants.

—*RB*

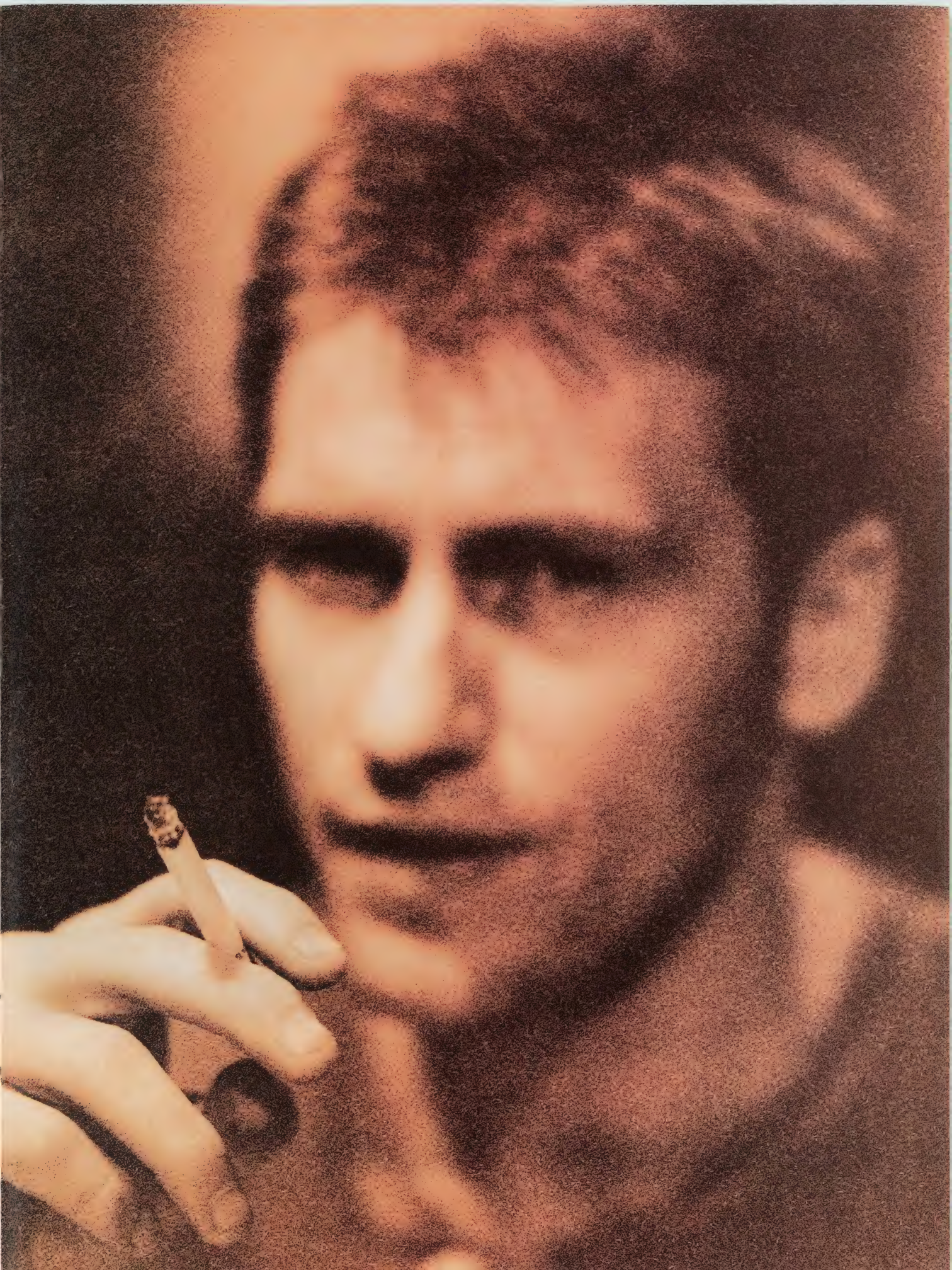
Actor, Comedian and Internet Huckster Denis Leary is Never at a Loss For Words (Even When He's Been Guzzling NyQuil)

SCREW THE NET

BY MITCHELL LAVNICK

It seems like every time you turn on the TV nowadays, there is another cloying ad from AT&T or Microsoft or MCI or Philips Magnavox, or some other big corporate bozo trying to sell their "version" of the Internet. You know the commercials. Sappy background music. A Don Pardo sound-a-like tugging mercilessly at your heart strings. The screen flashes some absurd scene, like starving children in Bangladesh teleconferencing with Sally Struthers (cut to the next scene), while a businessman hits the enter key, sits back contentedly in his chair, and waits for $700 billion of that easy Internet money to transfer to his bank account (cut to the next scene), and Grandma and Grandpa receive an e-mail finger painting, look lovingly into each other's eyes, and bless the technology they've lived to enjoy. Welcome to the Internet middle America... courtesy of the geniuses on Madison Avenue.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY SKID



Such visual inanity is why it is worth giving the folks at Lotus some credit. Who cares if Lotus Domino, their entry into the Internet and Intranet Web server market, is any good? Even if the product name conjures images of a large pepperoni and mushroom more than it does a Netscape or Microsoft competitor, Lotus still scored big time, just by having the guts to hire **Denis Leary** as their pitchman.

Yup. Denis Leary. The raving, nicotine fit, screw-the-PC-crowd, comedian/actor with the Marlboro voice. The guy who summed up the '70s in his one-man stand-up comedy show, *No Cure for Cancer*, this way: "There we were in the middle of the sexual revolution wearing clothing that guaranteed we wouldn't get laid." The Denis Leary whose take on the '80s was, "That was the only good thing about the '80s—we got rid of one of the Bee Gees. One down, three to go. That's what I say, folks."

Oh, and Leary's message for the techno-hyped '90s? "If you want to surf, go to Maui!"

Or so he says in one of his Lotus commercials, the one where he paces around a cybercafé filled with cyberhipsters (read: dorky-looking actors and actresses), and asks, "You know what I am sick of hearing about?"

"The Internet," someone replies. "The Internet," another echoes. "The Internet!" Leary confirms, as he walks past a vitamin-deficient Lyle Lovett look-alike with a big, red pompadour. "Nice hair," he says sarcastically. "A zillion dollars worth of technology and what are we doing with it?" Leary rants. "Browsing," a lady replies. Leary looks pissed.

It is a "don't give me any bull" kind of pissed. The kind of approach that resonates with his fans, whether he is giving his thoughts on racism: "I think Rodney King said it best when he said 'Ow, ow, ow, ow, '" or evaluating his own films via RealAudio at his official Web site (**www.celebsites.com/DenisLeary**) like *Operation Dumbo Drop*. ("Giant piece of shit! Huge piece of shit! Unless you are like four. Then maybe you'd enjoy it. It started out as a good idea, and ended up as a giant pile of elephant shit.")

You have to give Lotus credit for bringing this guy in to pitch their product. The fact is, there *is* a lot of bull on the Internet. And frankly, the Lotus ads make more sense than Leary's 1993 ads for Nike. You know, hire a guy to hawk your athletic shoes after he boasts in his stand-up act, "I love to smoke. I smoke 7,000 packs a day, OK? And I am never fucking quitting!"

So, you show up to interview Leary at the New York offices for his production company, Apostle Pictures, and you are expecting to meet a chain-smoking wise-ass with a one-liner about everything. You have instructions to get him to rant about the Internet like a trained seal. Instead, Leary is worn out, looking forward to the vacation that begins the second the interview is over, and he is dogged by a serious cold.

Perhaps it is his frantic schedule. He has several projects scheduled for release, including *Wag the Dog* with Robert DeNiro and Dustin Hoffman, and *Suicide Kings*, where he stars opposite Christopher Walken. In addition, he is busy preparing new material for a one-man stand-up show, which will appear on HBO later this year. On this day, Leary is doped up on cold medicine, but he hangs in there to offer a serious thought or two about the Internet, his official Web site, oh, and why he should be the spokesman for NyQuil...

> We eventually will be the greatest Web site ever made, and then from there we will go on to control the entire planet. We want to go out and blackmail, and take over people's minds.

***Internet Underground*: In one of your Lotus TV commercials, you rave about how you are sick of hearing about the Internet. Does the hype really bug you that much?**

Denis Leary: Yeah, I mean, I am not a computer-savvy guy besides sort of knowing how to turn on the computer and use it as a typewriter. So, I appreciated the increased technology in that area for a while, and then when the Internet thing happened, I primarily used it as a research tool. You know? I don't have a lot of down time, anyway, that I could spend in chat rooms and stuff like that, not that that would be the kind of thing that I would do. And, actually, a friend of mine, an actress, Sandra Bullock, who was really heavily into the Internet as soon as it took off, would spend a lot of time just talking to people and communicating with friends, and I sort of got into it through her, because she was telling me how great it was...So, I had an appreciation for it, just on the basis of what it was. And I think the Lotus commercials kind of summed up my feelings about it, because it is just typical human nature that once something gets invented, whether it is television or whatever it is, that there is the stuff that you want from it, and need from it, and then there are going to be a lot of people out there just bullshitting around, and going off into areas that you don't need to spend any time on...

So, what I liked about the commercials, even when they were first presented to me, was that the idea was going to be to use the Net for what it is good for, instead of getting all of this insane bullshit that exists out there...the UFO home pages, and all that stuff. It's the nature of the beast, you know?

IU: Have you checked out any chat rooms, or some of the insane stuff you are talking about?

DL: No. But I have a Web site. So we have an e-mail system, where whenever I get the opportunity I can go in and answer people and stuff. Even in that, the majority of the people are just regular people, but you get the 10 percent, or the 20 percent, who are just—I don't know what they are doing! You know? Like insane people in dark rooms, with computer terminals and nothing else. No friends. No family. No connections to the outside world.

IU: The gist of the Lotus message is people should use the Internet for what it is good for, business?

DL: Yeah. That's Lotus' message. And I think that includes, for instance, my business on the Internet would be film and TV and screenwriting. And I think that is what the great thing about it is.

IU: What were you trying to accomplish by developing your own official Web site?

DL: The Web site really came out of a number of fans. Two in particular have really incredible home pages, but you know, there is always that sense that they are skirting these copyright laws and stuff like that, and so they were sort of unofficial bootleg sites. And as I got more savvy to the Internet, friends of mine would ask me, "Have you seen this home page of yours?" And I was like "no," and I would go in and check it out, and I realized that they were sort of like up against a wall, in terms of getting certain information, or items, or bootleg CDs, or European versions of CDs, and stuff like that. And a couple of people that I knew, who were actors, had done the same thing. They had taken the home page people and sort of invited them in to help create this Web site so that everybody had this one place to go.

IU: How much e-mail have you been getting from your site?

DL: We get a lot of e-mail. We get like, jeez, I would say 300 or 400 pieces a week.

IU: And you actually read through it all?

DL: Yeah. It is hard. Sometimes I get these chunks of time, where I can do all of them. Right now I am like two weeks behind, because my schedule has been so insane.

I am waiting for, you know, the Kennedy assassination Web site discussing and explaining all the possible theories for the Kennedy assassination. I would hang out there for hours.

IU: Are the people who write to you electronically typical fans, or are they different than people who write to you via regular mail?

DL: I don't know. It is hard to say what a typical fan is. Some people obviously just write because they write to every celebrity home page they can get a response from. You know what I mean? Because, I remember when I was a kid, you would sit down with your friends, and write out 20 letters to different athletes. Some of the guys you didn't even like—just to get their pictures signed, so you could say to your friends, "Hey, I've got this one, this one and this one." It was all about quantity, as opposed to quality. And I think the typical fans are just generally interested in what is going on, and sort of are happy to be able to touch base a little bit.

IU: You mentioned before that you are not very computer-savvy. Yet, you do the Lotus commercials. A guy who isn't that computer-savvy to be a spokesman about the Net—does that amaze you at all?

DL: No. It doesn't. Because I think the no-bullshit approach to it is the way to go. You can use it as a tool, for whatever means you need it for. And I am not saying people shouldn't go into chat rooms, but if you have ever been in a chat room on more than a regular basis, you find that some of the stuff that goes on is just insane. People talking for hours about insane things!

IU: One of the best things on your official Web page is the RealAudio clips of you rating your own films. I learned that *The Ref* is the "greatest film ever made," while *Two if By Sea* "really fucking sucks." Since you are honest enough to talk about your own films that way, could you do the same thing, and give me an honest appraisal of your Web site?

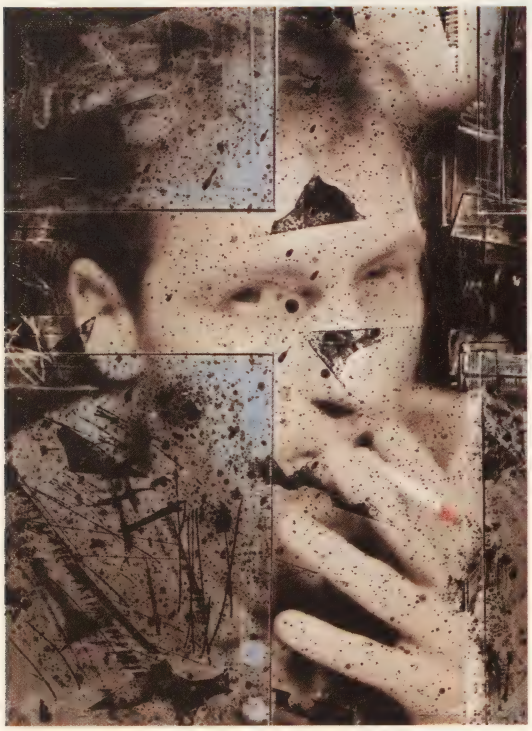
DL: I think we are still building towards where we want to be. So, I would say we are all right.

IU: Not the greatest Web site ever made?

DL: I don't think so. But we eventually will be the greatest Web site ever made, and then from there we will go on

to control the entire planet. That is our goal. We want to go out and blackmail, and take over people's minds. That is our ultimate goal.

IU: How did you hook up with celebsites.com, the guys behind your site?
DL: They approached us, because they were already in business with Jim Carrey, and Jim and I have the same agent. So, they came to us, and said, "Look, what do you guys think about this?" And we said, "We have actually been trying to find a way for somebody to have the time to create a site for us."
IU: I saw that on the main celebsites.com page.



How do you feel about being linked to a page where you can win a date with Brad Pitt?
DL: Ah. I don't think that is particularly my cup of tea. But he needs to have a Web page, if anybody needs to have one. I have a Web page. He should have a fucking Web page! There is no doubt about that. He should probably have three or four.

IU: Are you tracking how many people look at the page, and what they are looking at?
DL: No. But I think the guys from Celebsites do gauge that. You know? It always kind of amazes me, when you get behind on the e-mail, how many fucking pieces of e-mail there are. And a lot of those people just say whether they are students, or they work in a job—they say it like they have 10 minutes off and they are fucking around with their computers between things that they are supposed to be doing at work or at school. But some of them you get the sense that they are just roaming around the Internet looking for somebody to talk to. You know?

IU: Has the Internet been a good place to help charities you are involved with?
DL: It has been pretty good. The show itself (*Comics Come Home*, an annual show broadcast on Comedy Central, each New Year's Eve) does very well. The money we make from the broadcast on New Year's Eve is surprising...but the good thing about the Web site is that people find out about it. Some of them are more interested about the next live show, because they might be fans of me, or Janeane Garofalo or Jon Stewart, or whoever is involved in the show. But the good thing is they find out what the Neely thing is about. (The Cam Neely Cancer Foundation and Cam Neely House is a Boston-based organization that helps victims of cancer and their families, and is named for the Boston Bruins hockey player.) Because if they are attracted by the celebrity names, they don't really care what they give the money to. And once they find out what they are giving the money to, it is a cause, I think, that pretty much affects everybody, on some level.

IU: You also spotlight new comedians with RealAudio clips, at your site?
DL: Yeah. To a lesser extent, that is my sort of feeling less guilty about some of the guys that I think are great but haven't made it yet. I mean, overall, the key thing [about the Web site] is just sort of keeping in contact with people, and disseminating information on what is coming out next, or filmwise. Or, I am taping another one-man show for HBO in the fall, and so, as we go city to city on that tour, I will be able to let people know we are coming well in advance, and run contests, and that sort of thing.

IU: I know you are a big Boston sports nut, and a huge hockey fan. I saw that your favorite Web sites were mostly sports like the ESPN site. What do you use the Web for, aside from your own site?
DL: Yeah. I do a lot of sports updates. And a lot of times this stuff, especially if you are traveling, keeping updated on trades and drafts [is tough]. Like when they do the college draft and stuff for the NFL, baseball, even for hockey, the information is like almost always right there. Plus, a lot of times when you are watching some sport on television, and you get the updates, all you get is the scores. And if you can just jump into the Internet, sometimes you get everything you need to know in terms of particulars before the papers come out the next day. You know? ESPN has got a good one.

IU: Are there things, other than sports, you use the Net for?
DL: I am waiting for, you know, the Kennedy assassination Web site discussing and explaining all the possible theories for the Kennedy assassination. I would hang out there for hours. You know?

IU: You do stand-up comedy, you act, you direct, you write and you have your own film production company. You seem to be trying to get your foot into every aspect of media. Where does the Internet fit into that bigger world of media?

DL: I don't know. I mean, it looks like eventually it is going to sort of overtake all those things. You know what I mean? I mean, realistically speaking, you have got to assume that there is going to be a point in the not-so-distant future, where things like *Premiere* magazine, *Details* and *Time* magazine will all *just* appear on the Web. You know what I mean? It will still come out weekly, or monthly, or whatever it is. But you just punch them up on the Web and print them out. Otherwise, the difference between how fast you can get the stuff there, and how vast the audience is, compared to the newsstand, is amazing. You know?

I guess it will get better quicker, now. A lot of the movie Web sites are just terrible. They are like press books that they would give to the press when they went to the screening. And there is so much more they can do with it. You know? I think that is going to change now. One of the hardest things as an actor is when you are publicizing a movie, if you decide to publicize it, is then you have to sit in a hotel room and do what they call a junket, which is 60 reporters coming in one after the other, and asking the same questions. It is boring for the reporters, and boring for the actor, and I think eventually the solution for that, when the movie people figure it out, is that you can do it live on the Internet. You know? Where you can answer questions all at once. You are in one place, they are wherever they are. Nobody has to fly. And you can get it all done in one session. That is my dream, anyway.

IU: Do you have a message for people sitting in dark rooms playing with chat, or looking for conspiracy theory sites?
DL: I think people like that—if the Net didn't exist they would be doing the same thing, with whatever other piece of technology they had. You know what I mean? It is impossible to sort of cure them of the curiosity they have for minutiae, and for the things that the rest of us might look at very briefly, and go, "Yeah, OK." They're nuts. You know?

IU: Speaking of using it for what it is good for, so far, one of the most popular uses for the Net has been porn.
DL: Yeah. I have heard that. It is like *Celebrity Skin* magazine, which has been around now for 10 or 15 years, where they get a shot of Michelle Pfeiffer's left nipple, and they blow it up, and make it seem like a headline. It is just natural. I am just glad there are no shots of me out there.

IU: Seeing as how you have such a nasty cold right now, and knowing your material about cold medicine, I have to ask: Are you on DayQuil right now?
DL: I am on DayQuil right now, and NyQuil last night. I am just dying to do a NyQuil commercial. You know?

***IU*: On one of your unofficial Web sites, the guy has a banner that says "Sponsored by NyQuil."**
DL: Yeah. Right. I remember that site. Yeah. Unfortunately NyQuil is afraid to sort of be involved with any celebrities, or have any kind of endorsement.

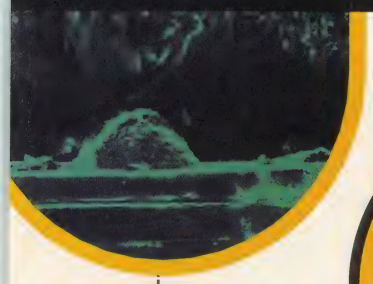
***IU*: Have you approached them?**
DL: No. I just heard. Whenever you use NyQuil, or a product name, or stuff like that, you find out whether you have to get clearance, and you also find out what the company's attitude is toward being perceived a certain way. There is no question that NyQuil is perceived by all of us the same way, which is sort of like, legal drugs. And one of the great things—the only good thing about having a cold—is that you get to act like a junkie for the week that you have it, because you are allowed to take whatever you want, and knock yourself out, so that you can sleep your ass off. And during the day, you take legal speed so that you can keep going and have your sinuses dried out. It always amazed me that NyQuil would be sort of against somebody coming out and saying this is the greatest shit in the world! You take one shot, and it knocks you out. I mean, that is the point of the product.

It always amazed me that NyQuil would be sort of against somebody coming out and saying this is the greatest shit in the world! You take one shot, and it knocks you out. I mean, that is the point of the product.

***IU*: As part of your act, when you take jokes about the Internet to a non-hardcore audience, does it play well?**
DL: Yeah. Surprisingly, most of the people I have bumped into, in terms of the Internet, and in terms of the Web site, and even the people from Lotus that we did the spots with, were really OK, in terms of sense of humor on that kind of stuff. So, so far I haven't had the politically correct Internet crowd try to chastise me. I am sure there is one. But most of the people that are involved in that seem to have a good sense of humor about things. I am sure there are some out there who don't.

***IU*: Has there been feedback as to whether the Lotus commercials are working?**
DL: Oh yeah. They love it. They love it. I mean, I was very happy with it. I thought they came out very funny. That is my bottom line. As long as it is funny, I don't mind endorsing the product and being connected to it. You know? But if it is going to be uptight, and not funny, there is no point in it, as far as I am concerned.

IU: Well, I was supposed to get you to rant before I walk out of here. Rather than try to provoke you, I will just ask. Do you have an Internet rant in you?
DL: If I wasn't on cold medicine, I would probably have one. You know what I mean? It is back to being a junkie. I am kind of spaced out right now. So, I get permission to be fucked up.



FAQ Confessions of a Smut Blocker

by Sarah Ellerman

It's a dirty job—in every sense of the word—but somebody's gotta do it. In order for services that filter the Internet to work, some employee has to rake through all that muck on the Web, scouting out every last topless photo and naughty word. Here at *Internet Underground*, preoccupied with putting together our "Sex issue," we found ourselves wondering: What kind of a job would that be? What would it pay? And what would it do to any sane person?

Well, it turns out that the job's called "Internet Content Supervisor." The pay? $7 per hour.

The service that employs these smut blockers is N2H2, an ISP in Seattle which bills itself as "the leader in Internet filters." N2H2 runs by the philosophy that subscribing to a blocked Internet service should be an option for people who want it. Their children's service, Bess (**www.bess.net**), is a "safe" launching point for youngsters to explore the Net without stumbling across porn or hate speech. Their service for businesses, Birddog, restricts workers from accessing certain categories of sites that their employer deems inappropriate. Far from judgmental, N2H2 also sells unrestricted access to the Net. Basically, they'll provide you with any level of freedom that you desire.

N2H2's offices in Seattle employ several blockers, most of whom work the job part-time in order to pursue other things. Many of the employees are struggling filmmakers; the joke around the office is that the whole bizarre experience is great script fodder. For this month's FAQ, *IU* conducted an interview with an N2H2 employee, who preferred that his name not be used in the piece.

IU: So what's the nitty-gritty of your job? How do you go about it?
It's gotten pretty much cut-and-dried these days. They basically have a program with every dirty word they can imagine. It goes through all the search programs and makes a list of every page that registers those words.

IU: Then you personally go check out anything that's suspect?
Yeah, they have a whole crew of people that just sit there and go through the pages. To find out whether or not it has violence, gore, sex, hate speech, illegal stuff like hacking information, anything drug-related, stuff you wouldn't want kids to see.

IU: What about a site that presents medical information, perhaps on AIDS or reproduction?
It all depends on how graphic it is. It's hard to say without knowing the language. Does the site cross the line between being informative and being the kind of thing that little kids in junior high are going to be crowded around at the library computer? It's subjective.

IU: What about political activism?
As long as it isn't hate-related, then it's OK. We had a big moral debate one day because I ran into a historical revisionism page. Many of us thought that was worse than pornography. But it's really sketchy. They're not explicitly advocating genocide—they're saying, "The Holocaust was a myth, we'll show you how the photos were doctored, here are the lies in what the so-called survivors said, and we can prove that it never happened."

IU: So you let that stay?
Well, what tends to happen with most of those is that you look around long enough and somewhere there's something that crosses the boundary between history and saying, "These people have got to be out of the country." That would cause us to block.

IU: Do you have strict written guidelines about what to block?
Not really...It's kind of understood after working there awhile and seeing the lists of objectionable words. But it's kind of weird, because after working there a couple of months, somebody will mention they're seeing this site and they don't know we're supposed to be blocking it. It still needs some organization. For instance, there are a lot of violent video games that none of us play. I've never seen the game Quake, but I guess people get blown away in it or something. So, they block that, for the gore. And for a while, none of us knew! Someone had been working there for a couple of months, and commented that it was irritating that these pages kept coming up. And we said, "Oh, that's because you're supposed to be getting rid of them."

The basics of the job is just that you look through these things and decide whether to let them go or not. At the bottom of the page, it gives you a menu that lets you rate it, and you click "good" or "bad."

I thought, "You can't block this, this is real life. Get a grip."

IU: Do you block a site as soon as you see an age verification page, or do you look at the page?
I tend to block as soon as I get to a warning page. There are a lot of times that you see a page and it's obvious what's going to come up next. But what surprises you, more often, is when you find just a bunch of numerals and they all say .gif. You have no idea what you're going to click on, but you have to at least click on something to find out what it's a directory of.

I've gotten to the point where I don't particularly want to see very much. And I had just kind of assumed that most of the other adults I was working with would feel the same way. But one of the women I work with was complaining that there wasn't really very much porn for women out there, that she had been hoping to find more of interest to her. Which really shocked me.

In a way, it can be interesting, but—I don't know. I think it can mess people up. So I try to see as little of it as possible, although it's inevitable that you're going to run into some.

Your mission, should you choose to accept it, is to scour the Net for filth... As a full-time job.

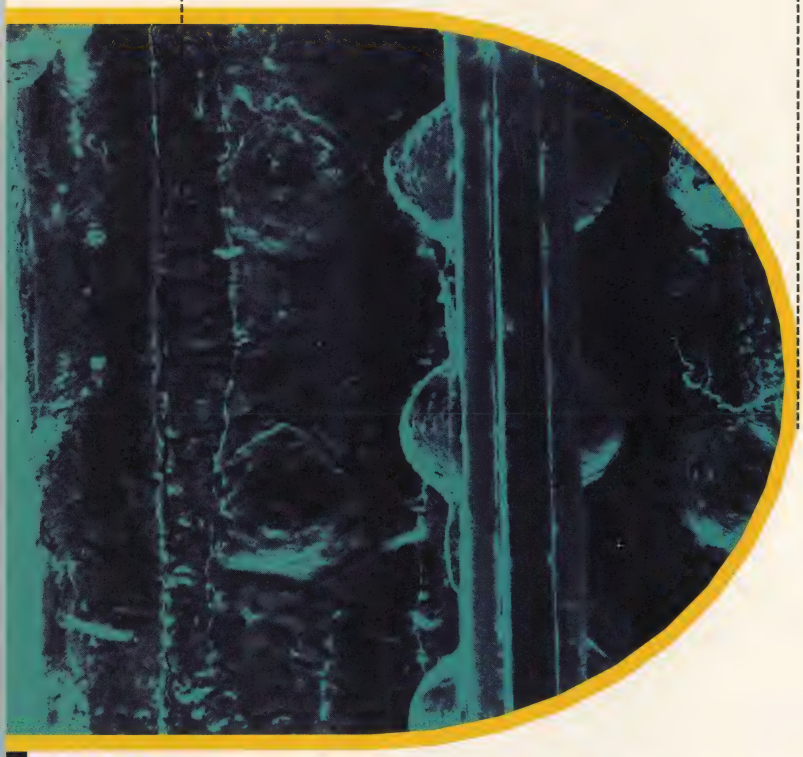
IU: So it's having an effect on you?
It's starting to. I think that's part of why I've been in a solemn mood all week. Finally, my boss said yesterday, "If you want to take some time off, you can," and I was just about to ask. So I took off this afternoon. I've just been nasty all week, I've been in this horrible mood, but ever since I left work this afternoon, I felt really good.

It's such a repetitive job. You just sit there for four hours or eight hours or however long. Even if it's not porn, it's looking through all these things and saying, "OK, is the word 'fuck' here; can I let this go, or do I have to find something vile to get rid of this," and it's really repetitive. I went to a bookstore after that, and I was looking for a book, and I was kind of zoning out. I couldn't remember what book I was looking for when I realized I was just looking through shelves for dirty words on the covers of books! And I thought, "You can't block this, this is real life. Get a grip."

I remember thinking to myself when I got the job: "If this becomes something that I can't get away from when I'm not at work, I have to quit." And I think I'm getting to that point now.

IU: Is it warping your personal life?
I think it is. Porn is one of those things that is kind of dangerous. You can compare it to alcohol or drugs: I think a small amount of it, used right, for some people, is OK. But it's really easy to get addicted to it, and it's really easy to let it control the way you see things.

IU: I would think it would be kind of overwhelming.
It's weird; everybody has their different ways of dealing with it. Some of the people deal with it *way* differently than I do, and our methods clash. Some people are still really into it; as soon as something comes up that they think is really sexy, they say *heyyyy* and they'll call a few other guys over and they'll all have fun looking. And some people just try to joke about it, saying, "What a great photographer," talking about the artistic merits of someone with a fish inserted somewhere.



There's not an act that hasn't been either photographed or described.

IU: Did you just say what I thought you said?
Yeah. *(laughs)* That's out there. I don't remember the URL, but I could probably get it for you.

IU: No, thanks, I don't really want it.
I understand. That's the other thing about the job—it can give you an extremely low opinion of humanity. Because there's not an act that hasn't been either photographed or described. There are things on dogs, children, horses, industrial machines—anything your imagination could possibly stray to. After a while, it does get really disgusting. It started turning my stomach, which I'm somewhat happy about, because I know at least it still bothers me.

IU: At least you know you're not numb.
There are *such* graphic images. There are a lot of porn anime sites, and there was one place where I clicked on the next window, and there was this stunning—*shocking*—picture there. I couldn't get it out of my head for about a day. It was like a bad song, where no matter what you do there's this thing going through your head. Whenever I was bored, this picture would come back to me. And I was thinking that if I were involved with somebody, it would be so incredibly disgusting to be with them sexually, and in the back of your mind have something like that start popping up.

IU: You don't think you could keep this job and be in a relationship?
I was actually dating someone when I started working here. It didn't last, but at the time I was still new enough at it that I could kind of divorce myself from it. But after all this time at the job, it becomes difficult to forget what you've seen. There are definitely a lot of unpleasant things I really would rather not have witnessed.

In fact, relating electronically has gotten really gross to me. E-mailing, I don't mind, because I know the person on the other end. But getting to know someone over the computer has lost all its romance for me. And when it comes to research, I've had a hard time finding anything really valid or interesting.

IU: What do people think of the service you provide?
A lot of people jump on it, because the moment you tell them what you do, they assume it's censorship. Which in a way it is, but people pay money so they don't have to look at this stuff. A lot of people get upset that it's censored in any way. They think that the people who are subscribing don't know what they're missing.

IU: To me, it just seems like another option. And I'm always in favor of more options.
Yeah, and you can always say it's helping create jobs. It's not just destroying the porn industry. It's saying the porn industry is helping other people. Like me.

IU: What's your official job title?
Um, I forget. Oh yeah, it's "Internet Content Supervisor."

IU: OK, but how would you describe it if you met somebody at a party?
At this point, I'd probably just say I worked in data entry. *(laughs)*

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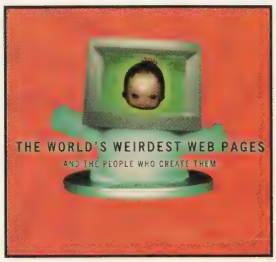
The World's Weirdest Web Pages
by Hank Duderstadt
No Starch Press
$12.95

★★

I don't want to go so far as to say this book is a blatant rip-off of *Internet Underground*, but if it looks like a duck and quacks like a duck, well...

The evidence: "Weird on the Web" (see page 24) has been a regular section of our magazine since we started publishing back in December of 1995. While we can't lay claim to a trademark on the adjective "weird," it seems author Hank Duderstadt could have chosen another title for his book to avoid confusion.



Forgetting the similar names for a moment, let's look at the book's contents. Duderstadt reports on 40 weird sites in the book. Of the 40, *IU* has featured at least 20 of the sites. Still a coincidence?

To his credit, Duderstadt goes beyond merely cataloging weird sites—he actually interviews the sites' authors to find out why they'd spend their free time creating such bizarre realms for the Net community. Of course, our magazine pioneered that concept, especially when it came to speaking with the Net's more fringe element.

So, personal feelings on the derivative nature of the book aside, there are other elements which make *The World's Weirdest Web Pages* an unsatisfactory work.

Any journalist will tell you that an in-person interview beats a phone interview. Likewise, a phone interview is far superior to an e-mail interview. All of the interviews in this book were conducted via e-mail. On top of that, there's the problem plaguing any book about the Net: timeliness. While many of the sites in this book are older than those hot dogs at the convenience store, what's worse is that several of them no longer exist or are no longer being updated (Mirsky's Worst of the Web, Highway 17 Page of Shame, Dan's Gallery of the Grotesque).

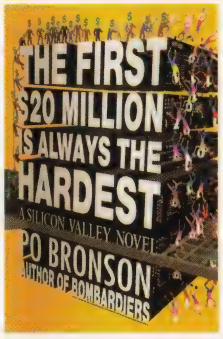
Though I've had nothing positive to say about the book up to this point, I still think it's a fun book to page through. The design is somewhat inventive and, in this world of bland Internet magazines and even blander Internet books, it's refreshing to run across a kindred spirit like Duderstadt. So go ahead and thumb through it on your next trip to Barnes & Noble, but then come home, fire up your computer and visit our archives at **www.underground-online.com** for free.

—Alex Gordon

The First $20 Million is Always the Hardest
by Po Bronson
Random House
$23.00

★★★★★

Because of its subtitle, I didn't want to like this book. "A Silicon Valley Novel," it proclaimed. I wanted to scoff at it for jumping on the bandwagon of geekdom-is-suddenly-cool, wanted to skewer it for posing. I opened the book up before bed, hoping to be bored to sleep. I certainly chose the wrong book. *$20 Million* was a rollicking roller-coaster ride, and I was more than a little tired—and repentant—the next day.



$20 Million reports on the world of mind games, backstabbing and double-crossing that is the climate of Silicon Valley today. But the news isn't all bad—there were also startling glimpses of teamwork, ingenuity and good intentions. The book follows a team of dreamers—programmers at a research lab—through the rigors of every stage of a project. What starts as a crappy assignment suddenly seems like it might pull the rug out from under the entire computing industry. Enough twists and turns follow to keep even a very sleepy editor up all night.

Bronson has certainly paid attention to his protagonists. He tells the stories of their lives in convincing detail, sprinkling the tale with tiny facts about the characters' dress, speech inflections, diet, love lives, cars and lies. He's got computer jargon down, as well as technical analogies: a programmer named Tiny who suffers from seizures likens his affliction to being caught in an infinite loop.

The novel is so honest that it's a book with bitter pills for many different people. Seeing Andy's naïveté get tromped on might bruise idealists. The intellectual arrogance of Francis Benoit might grate on others. The most bitter pill for me to swallow was the characters' largely condescending attitude toward women. The story is told through the perceptions of the lead characters, and they're far from perfect. Their shallow and derogatory comments toward women, coupled with the fact that no female was portrayed competing on their turf, may be irritating to other female readers.

The site for the book is located at **users.aol.com/pobronson/hardest.htm**, and I highly recommend stopping by. A hilarious quiz, outtakes from the book and comments from the author round out a fantastically enjoyable read.

—Sarah Ellerman

REVIEWS

Cyber Speak
by Andy Ihnatko
Random House
$12.95
★★★★

There is so much to know about the Internet that even old-timers occasionally fret over a term or acronym that they really can't define. In a CNN report covering a recent Internet technologies convention, individuals were singled out to help explain some of the more ubiquitous terminology associated with going online. Cornered and asked to explain the meaning of HTTP, one conventioneer fumbled a bit, then authoritatively proclaimed: "Hit To The Page."

Among the host of new glossaries and dictionaries containing a mess of online jargon (mostly being used, apparently, by *lamers* just trying to sound *kewl*) appears Andy Ihnatko's *Cyber Speak*. Decidedly Net hip and professing to be "geeky," Ihnatko has pooled together most of the universally accepted jargon and chat/Usenet acronyms (as opposed to acronyms particular to smaller groups of people that sometimes get added to the big lists: PIMPL for Pee In My Pants Laughing? C'mon, people). But the book predominantly specializes in dispelling the mystery around such terms as TWAIN, Archie, ASCII and IRQ. It even settled a longstanding argument between our staff and that of another department over the pronunciation of GIF (it's a hard "G," in case you're wondering).

Windows users be warned: Ihnatko is firmly Mac-oriented and says so (not having achieved the equilibrium of those of us who are forced to use whatever our companies make available), but Gates-heads should enjoy the bouts of Mac-deprecating humor he includes. In all, an informative, entertaining and useful read.

—Troy Brophy

Eye 2 Eye Computer Eyestrain Treatment System
by Solutions In Sight
$49
★

On my desk was a plain, white cardboard box, a bit larger than a 20-piece Chicken McNugget box, with a Post-It Note saying: "Review this." I opened, I rummaged. The box contained four small plastic pouches. The first pouch contained a wire-bound book...boring. The next held a 3½-inch floppy disk...better. Third came a clear fluid in a squirt bottle labeled Screen Clean. Lastly, and most intriguing of all, was a pouch holding a plastic lens-type thing and a string with three colored beads on it! An enclosed brochure informed me that I was looking at Solution in Sight's Eye 2 Eye Computer Eyestrain Treatment System.

Naturally, before getting into the book or the software, or even determining the point of the product, I wanted to know what the string with the red, green and yellow beads was for. I mean, it's just ordinary string, like kite string, tied (not very expertly) into a loop at each end. Unraveled it measured over 10 feet, with these three little beads...

Clearly, I was going to have to do some reading. The wire-bound book read like a Ph.D. candidate's abstract, with sections like "The Systems Involved in Visually Induced VDT Fatigue," and impressive bibliography pages following each section. After just a few minutes I was much more aware of the important role proper lighting and VDT (Video Display Terminal) positioning in my office environment play to my ocular health. My eyes began to ache immediately in protest of the months of poor screen contrast and long, rest-free hours spent staring at a point 1.5 feet away.

The software in the kit is designed to pop a window up on your screen every 30 minutes or so to remind you to rest and even lubricate your eyes. Also on the disk is a program that helps you select a more comfortable color scheme for your Windows environment. I was immediately notified that my monitor needed a good cleaning with the accompanying Screen Clean product.

After a bit more searching through the literature, I finally found the instructions for use of the Brock Orthoptic Training Device (kite string with beads). I don't want to give too much away, for those of you who plan to rush to **www.eye2eye.com** to order the kit, but its use did elicit quizzical looks from passing co-workers.

NOTE: BOXES TO SCALE

I am pleased that this box was left on my desk. It saved me the trouble of a trip to the library for a book on visual comfort at the computer, as well a stop at Toys 'R' Us for some kite string and beads. However, I do have the problem of switching back my Windows color settings to the way I had them. I also need to figure out how to stop that message from popping up every 30 minutes to tell me to rest my eyes—it keeps interrupting the games I'm playing.

—Troy Brophy

a closer look at this month's #1 site

The incessant, grating pulse of a busy signal. The Muzak version of that Melissa Etheridge song that keeps playing in a continuous loop while you're on hold for two hours with your ISP. And playing. And playing. And playing. Trying to get some customer service on the Net is enough to leave anyone frustrated and a little bit crazy.

Many consumers simply give up trying to cancel online services or return products they bought on the Net, instead taking out their aggressions by angrily slamming down the phone or cursing Steve Case. Others embark on more severe courses of action. A woman once told Phillip Underhill that she was so fed up with trying to get through to someone at America Online to cancel her subscription that she got in her car and drove to AOL headquarters in Virginia. Once there, she was finally able to demand some assistance.

Sure, this is an extreme case, but most netizens have been burdened at some point with unwanted junk mail, mysterious charges to their credit card or the inability to cancel a subscription to some foot fetish newsgroup. To Underhill, the founder and designer of Cancel-It, the inability of Net consumers to cancel services online is a direct conflict with the philosophy of the Web as a fully interactive medium. Hundreds of businesses launch new sites on the Web every day, Underhill says, but there seems no way to cancel services or return products virtually.

"Online there's no return desk," says Underhill. "There's no place where you can grab the neck of the guy behind the counter and scream, 'Give me my money back!'"

So 29-year-old Underhill is leading a one-site crusade to eliminate endless busy signals, incompetent customer service and angry caravans to corporate headquarters. In short, he wants to make "point-click-cancel" as easy as "point-click-purchase."

Cancel-It works as a consumer advocacy service, helping online consumers cancel unwanted mailings, subscriptions and services, free of charge. Visitors simply fill out a universal cancellation form that asks for basic logistical data, an explanation of the type of service they wish to disconnect and the reasons for canceling that service. Underhill has never failed to honor a canceling request, although he says that sometimes it takes a few days, especially if he's dealing with an unmanned newsgroup or other automated service. After launching the site, he was surprised that most companies and services he contacted were responsive, cooperative and polite. He says that it helped restore his faith in the online community.

"I thought we'd catch hell," he says. "But it's been very positive. People lurking behind computer screens think differently. We're not as polite behind a screen—it makes us mean and cranky. But in this case, we got the opposite reaction."

The inspiration for the site stemmed from Underhill's own personal frustration in trying to cancel an online service. "I got the idea four years ago when I was constantly receiving disks in the mail," he laughs. "So I got on for my 10 free hours and after two hours, I knew that I didn't want it. But I couldn't unsubscribe, and they kept billing my credit card for 10 months and driving me crazy!"

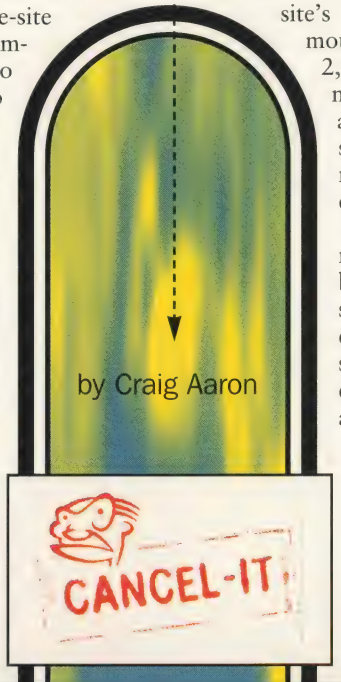
As a joke, Underhill set up a site that related his ordeal and promised to help cancel unwanted services, newsgroups and mailing lists. Without any organized effort or promotion, he received more than 5,000 requests for assistance. He discovered that the Net was in need of an important service. "It was a grassroots thing," he says. "Thousands of people had the same problems I did."

There was no existing model, so Underhill started from scratch to develop the site and software tools that added a new community-service dimension to his online marketing business, the New York City-based DotCom Interactive. He developed scripts to forward cancellation requests directly to both small newsgroups and the big, corporate online services like CompuServe. News of the site's success spread almost entirely by word-of-mouth, attracting more than 10,000 visitors and 2,000 cancellation requests in a month. While most of the bugs have been worked out of the automated system, Underhill and his staff still spend many hours a week on this pet project, monitoring Cancel-It and tracking down elusive operators.

Despite the attention Cancel-It has received, Underhill says he doesn't want to become the "Yahoo! of cancellation." He envisions Cancel-It as an advocacy service that will encourage online businesses to monitor themselves. His goal is to make the Internet a more efficient medium for commerce, information and entertainment. In turn, Underhill says that he would love to be put out of business by responsible companies that provide credible customer service and take the hassles out of cancellation.

Underhill concludes, "Cancel-It is a symptom of the problem and not the answer."

by Craig Aaron



SPOTLIGHT

Cancel-It
www.cancel-it.com

80 CONSPIRACIES *Don't look now, but there's a black helicopter following you...*

WEBGuide

It's May—time for a fresh stampede of eager entrants into the job market. And on the Internet, there's jobs à go go, from electrical engineering gigs to entry-level food-tasting positions (we only wish!). In this month's WebGuide, our section on careers will guide you through corporate culture and classified ads online. And if you don't have any luck finding a job, you can always hold out for that $10 million from the Publishers' Clearing House site. Still no go? Maybe there's a conspiracy against you—alien intelligence, the Illuminati or the Tesla Death Ray. You can check them all out right here; trust us, we're on your side. A tip of the mind-control cap goes to our WebGuide co-conspirators: Simon Burris (Culture), Lars Hundley (Tech, Read) and Bryan VanDyke (Tunes).

72 TUNES *The beat goes on* 73 TECH *Expansion ports for your electronic aptitude* 74 ENTERTAINMENT *Web sites that would like to thank the Academy*

might go if she surfed the Net 78 CAREERS *Capitalism just couldn't function without them* 79 CONTESTS *Because baby needs a new pair of shoes*

75 READ *Our zone for zines* 76 RECREATION *Advice and activities for your wetware* 77 CULTURE *Where Lisa Simpson*

ARI'S SIMPLE LIST OF RECORD LABELS

aleph0.clarku.edu/~aherzog/links/rec_lab.html

Ari's aria is a simple song: just the record labels, some links and e-mail addresses. Ari comes through with his promise, compiling an impressive list of record labels from A to Z. Unless you're looking for a jump page, you may be disappointed to find that there's not much more than that. Ari's is a Spartan outfit, and a few more images would be nice—although we have to admit, the download time is certainly a breeze.

★★★

BELIEVE IN ANYTHING WHILE YOU'RE HERE—R.E.M.

www.stipey.com

Talk about a passion—stipey.com is a dreamland for fans of that band named after rapid eye movement. The REM news section has press releases dating back through March of 1996, including lyrics and song samples from the latest album, "New Adventures in Hi-Fi." The Web-BBS offers something most music sites are afraid to provide—a place where everyone can comment on the band, on songs they love and songs they'd rather forget existed. Either way, this Web site rocks.

★★★★★

COUNTING CROWS

www.countingcrows.com

These guys certainly are crowing about a lot of things—so many, in fact, that just loading the Counting Crows page takes forever. Nonetheless, the information is in-depth, and the page is loaded—ticket giveaways, lyrics from *Recovering the Satellites*, and a preview of the upcoming video. Plus, complete transcripts of an America Online chat with the band, and whole articles from *Rolling Stone* and *Q* magazines. Hey, we can dig that: caw! Caw!

★★★★

THE DUKE ELLINGTON SOCIETY

duke.fuse.net

Duke Ellington hated the word jazz. How do we know? Simple: Like all hip cats should, we checked out the Duke Ellington Society's audio files of Duke singers like Bing Crosby singing the "St. Louis Blues," their *Great American Songbook* files, and their five- to 10-minute interviews of singers and musicians. The Society's site blinks and flashes just the right amount, without too much excessive, jazzy stuff—just the way Duke Ellington would have liked it.

★★★★★

EYEBALLS: PIXIES, FRANK BLACK, THE BREEDERS

www.pixies.com

The Pixies may not be slick or mainstream, but this Web site is as smooth and professional as you can get. Want some pictures? How about thirty or so? Entertainers Frank Black and the Breeders are also covered with album photos and sound snatches. All the pages are Java-enhanced and have spiffy animation. Not only that, but you can get your Pixies fix in either English or Francais (just in case you're bilingual).

★★★★

IMUSIC'S SOUNDGARDEN WEBSITE

imusic.interserv.com/soundgarden

The site isn't as comprehensive as some other music sites, but what they offer is well done. RealVideo clips from recent videos and live tracks like "Ty Cobb" are offered—but the real gems here are the up-to-date news items and the discography. Unfortunately, the site opts out on any other extras, and ends up fizzling—especially since it takes a little too long to load.

★★★

INTERFERENCE MAGAZINE—U2 FANZINE

www.interference.com

Interference's Web site was responsible for leaking some of U2's early studio work onto the Internet. Such underground activity makes us proud—despite their shady ways, Interference puts together a comprehensive U2 fanzine. The magazine boasts audio samples of U2 and pictures from the new album *Pop*; the "Discotheque Diaries" chronicle the band's studio endeavors with unofficial studio shots. Whoever tunneled in and dug this stuff up did some good digging.

★★★★

THE INTERNET BEATLES ALBUM

www.primenet.com/~dhaber/beatles.html

The Internet Beatles Album is one of many, many Beatles sites—thing is, this one is actually pretty groovy: Beatles Myths, Paul Is Dead clues, sound clips of the band and photo shoots. Although the Internet Album has the annoying habit of naming categories after Beatles songs (Please Mr. Postman for e-mail, Across the Universe for links), this site is swell—Nirvana fans who want to look cultured ought to make it first on their list.

★★★★★

MODIFIED ONLINE

www.modified.com

Modified Online lets ravers with Shockwave plug-ins and plenty of time on their hands mix their own dance beats online. Although most of the site is an advertisement for a CD-ROM, you can preview tracks like "1 Gigahertz Chiller" and "Count Cool-out Slow Mo." A fast connection is a must—file sizes go anywhere from 200k to a meg and a half. Better learn how to dance in place while you wait.

★★★

MORNINGLORY ONLINE

www.bestusedcds.com

Morninglory Online is an online music store that sells something usually offered only at local stores: used CDs. While the online catalog leaves something to be desired (like track listings of the CDs) the prices, including shipping and handling, are rock bottom—most are around $6.99. Plus, the New Releases section of the site will give you a look at who's coming out with new CDs—and, in case you want to order something new, you can get that here, too.

★★★★

MUSIC PICK

www.geocities.com/SunsetStrip/Towers/8403/index.html

Wanna-be music reviewers can scratch their itch at the Music Pick—this site offers a Challengers and a Champions group of songs by alternative artists, and asks users to vote on the songs they like best from each group. RealAudio snippets and related links are offered for each artist. Music Pick displays some tasty pie charts with the voting results, but unfortunately, there isn't much beyond the reviews.

★★★

ONTHEAIR.COM—LIVE RADIO ON THE NET

ontheair.com

Country music, Urban, News radio, Rock, Dance, Jazz—if you've got a genre, Ontheair has a station for you: From Rock 106 in Peoria to Q104 in Nova Scotia, they carry over 240 stations from across the globe. If you've got Real Audio and Xing Streamworks, you can make your computer a music machine. The only question is—why use your $2,000 computer to do something that a $24.95 radio could do (unless you have to hear radio Nova Scotia from Thailand)?

★★★★

THE SHITGIVEITS

www.angelfire.com/sd/SHITGIVEITS/

Never let it be said that punk rockers are out of touch. The Shitgiveits (you figure it out) have a Web site which they themselves update, complete with nihilistic comments, links to BeerCity and skateboarding paraphernalia. It's not the best Web page, but the Shitgiveits' site reveals what today's punk is all about: a lot of noise (a neon orange background) and fake attitude (at the bottom of the page...an advertisement?). Sid Vicious must be spinning in his grave.

★★

FRANK SINATRA

www.blue-eyes.com

Frank Sinatra may get under your skin in a bad way or a good way, but this site will excite no matter what: order the Christie's Sinatra Auction catalog, view the Sinatra Chick Gallery (oh, Frankie!) or read about the Senate's decision in February to award Sinatra a Congressional Medal. Only one problem: The damn thing crashed Netscape three times in a row. Maybe the Chairman is sipping a little too heavily on the Java?

★★★★

ALCOR LIFE EXTENSION FOUNDATION

www.alcor.org

Don't get buried and rot when you die. Freeze your head! Cryonics is the "technology for freezing a person after a terminal illness or a fatal accident, in the hope that medical science will be able to revive that person in the future, when life extension and anti-aging have become a reality." Alcor has been freezing folks since 1972, and they even have special rates for students.

★★★

CANADA-FRANCE-HAWAII TELESCOPE

www.cfht.hawaii.edu

Whose telescope is it, actually? They never really explain that minor detail at this site, but they do display some pretty cool images in the Best Pictures Gallery. You can check out Saturn and even the not-quite-as-famous-as-Haley's Hale-Bopp Comet. If you're really into the details of large telescope astronomy, you can read about the telescope control systems and even the operations schedule.

★★

CENTER FOR SCIENTIFIC CREATION

www.creationscience.com

Not everyone believes that the universe is billions of years old and that humans evolved from apes. The Center For Scientific Creation Web site argues against evolutionist science on a point-by-point basis. It attempts to answer such questions as, "Did the Flood last 40 days and 40 nights?" and "Is there life in outer space?" It's an interesting look at scientific theory, whether you accept evolution or not.

★★★★

CERT COORDINATION CENTER

www.cert.org

Computer security is a serious issue, and CERT Coordination Center aims "to take proactive steps to raise the community's awareness of computer security issues, and to conduct research targeted at improving the security of existing systems." They even offer a 24-hour hotline for system administrators in distress. You can also find patches and workarounds for known security problems and sign up for mailing lists on firewalls and viruses, if you're an administrator.

★★★

THE COMPUTER MUSEUM NETWORK

www.tcm.org

If you've ever wanted to design your own robot, but didn't know where to start, then check out the Computer Museum Network. The Shockwave-enhanced section gives you a task and lets you design a robot to complete it. You have six design elements to choose from, including energy, intelligence, movement and even looks. Does a robot really need to be good looking to solve a task? Find out.

★★★★

CPSR

snyside.sunnyside.com/home/

The Computer Professionals for Social Responsibility ask the question, "Can't we all just get along?" Well, they don't say it exactly like that, but this group's goal is to "provide the public and policymakers with realistic assessments of the power, promise and limitations of computer technology." You'll find subjects that run from Caller ID to the Clipper Chip, and a good section on technology and the workplace.

★★★★

DISPLAYTECH

www.displaytech.com

Big screen TVs are overrated. We prefer the thumbnail-sized ferroelectric liquid crystal displays by Displaytech. Mount one of these babies on your glasses and you can have "a portable display with the size, resolution and color clarity of a workstation monitor." We wonder exactly what they mean by "low cost," because we'd like to buy one so we can stop worrying about people sneaking up on us when we're surfing at work. (Uh, just kidding, boss.)

★★★★

EVANGELIST

www.evangelist.macaddict.com

The site describes its mission as a way "to help people evangelize Apple, Macintosh, and Newton—and to make the world a better place!" It's also the place where you can sign up for the free e-mail newsletter from the most famous Mac evangelist of them all, Guy Kawasaki. Mac fans should go straight to the section called "Why Mac is better" to load up on ammunition to shoot down those Wintel naysayers.

★★★

THE FLAGSHIP SEARCH ENGINE

flagship.kw.net/personal.htm

If you've been looking for a way to make your own Web site searchable for free, then thank your lucky stars and head over to the Flagship Search Engine. This engine does a word-specific indexing of your site after you insert a few lines of HTML into your page. And if you're a non-technical type, he even provides the HTML for you, so you don't have to figure out anything yourself.

★★★

THE INCA TRAIL

www.tardis.ed.ac.uk/~angus/Gallery/Photos/SouthAmerica/Peru/IncaTrail.html

Taking this virtual tour of the Inca Trail has numerous advantages, according to the archaeologists who built this Web site. "It doesn't take 2-6 days to complete (unless you've got a very slow modem), there are no flies and no one has ever got amoebic dysentery on the virtual Inca Trail (yet)." The photos give you an idea of what the real trail is like and might even tempt you into making the trip in real life.

★★★

INSECTA

www.insecta.com

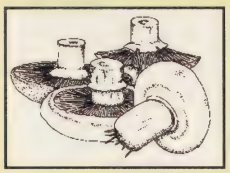
Check out the Bug of the Month or take a virtual tour at Insecta, the Web site of The Spencer Entomological Museum, located at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver, B.C., Canada. The museum itself, which is currently closed due to lack of funding, is maintained by volunteers and includes 600,000 specimens. We think it'll probably take them a few years to get through 600,000 bugs of the month.

★★★★

INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY FOR MUSHROOM SCIENCE

www.hri.ac.uk/isms/

This group describes itself as "a non-political and non-profit-making organization." Duh. What kind of a mushroom science society is political and profit-making? You'll find a nice section here devoted to major edible mushroom species, complete with illustrations and descriptions of where they can usually be found. We're pretty sure it was a *Volvariella volvacea* that we got on our supreme pizza last week. Or maybe it was a *Flammulina velutipes*.



★★

THE LASER CONNECTION

members.aol.com/planetcoo/lasers.html

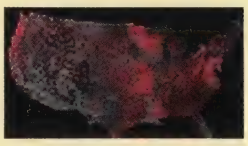
You've seen every Pink Floyd laser light show within a 100-mile radius, but you want more. So check out the Laser Connection for links to "the best of the laser industry." We figured that laser companies would have outstanding Web sites, because they're high tech and into show business. Unfortunately, what we found was that most of them have the same goofy black background and gaudy, amateurish graphics. But any site where you can find out where to buy used lasers is pretty cool in our book.

★★

USGS NODE OF THE NATIONAL GEOSPATIAL DATA CLEARINGHOUSE

water.usgs.gov/nsdi/

Looking for a hydrolic unit map or a digital elevation model? How about a landsat multi-spectral scanner—or just a plain old map? You can find them all here at the USGS Web site. Some of the information here is available for free, but you'll have to pay for the really detailed stuff. If you know exactly what you're looking for, you can search for it by keyword, or by identifying the area by its latitude and longitude boundaries.



★★★

YEAH MAN, ITELLYAWHAT
www.cyberramp.net/~noel/rside/boom.html
Fans of Fox's *King of the Hill* may be able to figure out the subject of this site from the title: Yeah Man, Itellyawhat honors Boomhauer as a sage and "truly gifted Texan." The muttered ramblings of the cartoon character are collected at the site, where you can listen to them as audio files or read them deciphered into text. Here, for example, is "Boomhauer on Character": "Say, Hank, man...I don't know what you're thinking, man...but y'all got to know, man...I ain't no dang ol' Woody Allen with that little Soon Li, man...Nothin' gonna happen." Other Boomhauer wisdom includes help on golf swings and tips on attracting a mate ("Heh. Heh. Boy, I tell you what...that dang ol' CK One...Man, it's just like catnip"). According to the site, show creator Mike Judge based Boomhauer's garbled speech on a voice-mail he received from a "ranting Southerner" who called to complain that an episode of *Beavis and Butt-head* hadn't aired on time. Texan Webmaster Noel Gross adds in the caveat that the transcripts here are unofficial: "I doubt anyone but Mike Judge knows precisely what Boomhauer is saying. However, it is my intention to translate Boom's utterances to the best of my ability." Y'all git on over t' this dang ol' site an' check it out, man.
★★★★★

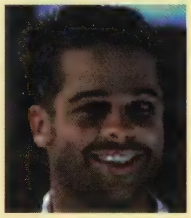
our pick

THE BAGPIPES GO TO THE MOVIES
www.ems.psu.edu/~fraser/PipesMovies.html
Most people who saw the trailers for *Braveheart* probably didn't notice that the hillside piper was holding a modern set of bagpipes—400 years more advanced than the pipes that would have been played in William Wallace's time. But this sort of stuff doesn't escape Scott Williams and Alistair Fraser, who've catalogued the movie and TV appearances of their favorite instrument, from the incorrectly handled toy bagpipes in *The Avengers* to the cameo made by "the great Highland piper Neil Angus MacDonald" in *Whisky Galore*. It's a surprisingly long and inclusive list, recalling such screen moments as when a panicked Mike Myers, in *I Married an Ax Murderer*, yells, "We have a piper down! I repeat, we have a piper down!"
★★★★

THE BEELZEBOB SAGET PAGE
www.asacomp.com/~mdutro/bob.htm
Subtitled "The Official Bob Saget Hate Page," this site avows that the host of *America's Funniest Home Videos* is simply Satan masquerading as a comedian. Saget, it seems, has been infiltrating unsuspecting minds through his television shows—first that one with the Olsen twins (or "hell-spawn," as this site calls them), and now the Sunday night *Home Videos* show. In addition to stating his own case, site creator Marc Dutrow invites visitors to share their own thoughts on the alleged Prince of Darkness. Writes one sympathizer, "If I could be anyone in the world, I would choose Bob Saget, so that I could kill myself."
★★★★

MAGGIE CHEUNG HOMEPAGE
www.inxpress.net/~tcampbell/maggie.htm
Actress Maggie Cheung doesn't have the name recognition of her erstwhile costar Jackie Chan, but if you watch Hong Kong movies, you're likely to recognize her and to appreciate this piece of Web adoration from a fan. Though her career kicked off with a position as first runner-up for Miss Hong Kong 1983, Cheung doesn't fit the breast-implanted bimbo image that beauty contests might bring to mind. She really is lovely, as the extensive image galleries here illustrate—and talented, judging from the filmography (over 75 movie appearances to her name!).
★★★

COLIN'S MOVIE MONOLOGUE PAGE
www.lclark.edu/~ryono/mono.html
Everyone can quote movie lines, but can you do whole movie monologues? After spending a while at this site, you'll be able to recite Christopher Walken's "gold watch" monologue from *Pulp Fiction*, Rosie O'Donnell's *Beautiful Girls* rant, and Brad Pitt's conspiracy-riddled ravings from *Twelve Monkeys*, among others. Then you can "go around for a whole day, repeating [them] over and over, and doing the appropriate voices, scaring all those around you. Or not."
★★★



DR. DANIEL'S MOVIE EMERGENCY
www.stairwell.com/doc/
The Net has any number of cranky movie reviewers, but this one's got a cleverly crafted site that revolves around medical metaphors (ratings range from "Dead on Arrival" to "Medical Miracle"). The Examining Room has current reviews, while old reviews are stashed at the Morgue. We liked the set of cardinal rules for moviegoers: "Never, under any circumstances, go see any film that has an actress named Shannon above the title on the poster ('cause you can bank on it being on Cinemax later that night)" and "If your director is Kevin Costner, Kenneth Branagh or Richard Attenborough, order the SMALL Coke."
★★★★

VAL KILMER
www.eskimo.com/~kilmer/
Here's an attractive fan site that not only offers pictures and a filmography for the star of *Batman Forever* and *The Saint*, it includes a collection of articles that goes back to (egads!) 1985, when a *Boston Herald* writer deemed him "handsome enough to stop traffic yet determined to be noticed only for his acting ability." As the swooning admirers of his Elvis-like character in *Top Secret!* might say, he's just dreamy.
★★★★

THE M*A*S*H 4077TH HOMEPAGE
www.netlink.co.uk/users/mash/
The extensive set of pages here about *M*A*S*H* (the movie, the TV show, the books, the characters, the actors, the theme song) could lead visitors to believe they've run across an official site, but in fact it's all a product of the efforts of British *M*A*S*H* fan Andy Lawson. Visitors can take a wonderfully crafted trivia challenge, read about a couple of the show's continuity errors ("In an early episode Henry called his wife Mildred; later she became Lorraine") or slog through episode guides for all eleven seasons. Just about everything a fan page should be.
★★★★★

THE LOVELY GWYNETH PALTROW
www.ugcs.caltech.edu/~bh/gwyneth.html
"This is the first time I've dedicated many hours of my life to some girl I don't know," disclaims Ben Hendricks, the webmaster here. Those hours have produced an excellent site: articles galore about Gwyneth, plus an image gallery that includes a few dozen "public sightings." In compiling GP information, Hendricks has come across some entertainingly silly stuff, like an essay titled "Why Gwyneth Paltrow Must Die" (trust us, it's fun).
★★★★

THE RENDEZVOUS
www.li.net/~kirkg/home.htm
One-stop shopping (almost) for sound files and images from violent movies can be found at The Rendezvous, a site devoted to movies that webmaster Kirk Gostkowsi likes. He's quite the Quentin Tarantino fan (*From Dusk Till Dawn* even merits a section), but also goes in for typical Hollywood blockbusters like *Mission: Impossible* and *Phenomenon*. The *Pulp Fiction* files are broken up by character, so you can go straight to Tim Roth ordering coffee or Samuel Jackson exclaiming that "This IS a tasty burger!"
★★

APPARENTDEPTH
www.apparentdepth.com
Try some interactive "tag team fiction," enjoy stories of someone else's childhood or read "humorous opera stories." (Operas are funny?) We learned a lot from the essay about urinal etiquette in the men's room. As the author puts it, "The lengths to which an American man will go to avoid the shame of another American man catching sight of his penis is absolutely ludicrous."
★★★★

CONNECT TIME
www.connect-time.com
If you get the Sunday paper, you might have seen the paper version of this zine, devoted to Internet-related subjects like buying a car online or using the Web to help locate missing and abducted children. One article on the accumulation of useless home pages asks, "Does the world really need to know what Dave Moore had for lunch today?" Well, actually, we were sort of wondering when he last had a ham sandwich with pickles.
★★★

ENTROPY GRADIENT REVERSALS
www.panix.com/~clocke/EGR/
We were welcomed to this site with an audio file that exclaims, "Holy shit!" Enjoy informative

Q&As like the one "in which we interview Mr. Ed (yes, the horse) on the Future of the Internet." The legal disclaimer reads, "Nothing to disclaim at this time." You have to appreciate honesty like, "Unlike other online publications vying for a wafer-thin slice of your limited attention span, we don't pretend to have any particular use for you." Who needs useful when you've got funny?
★★★★

EUGENE'S SHIRT
www.gannon.edu/other/student/monocello/
This zine, run by students at Gannon University in Erie, Pa., covers important topics like the 10 rules for a first date. "Don't defecate in your hand and smear it on the wall. Because feces isn't a first date topic." The culture section features amusing poems like "Ode to My Gangsta Bitch Girlfriend," and the "Semi-Live ATM Cash Machine Video Cam" is definitely worth a look.
★★★

GEEKGIRL
www.geekgirl.com.au
When you come to check out Geekgirl, make sure you have some time, because this site is filled to the brim with "you-gotta-read-this"

kind of content. We were blown away by the Shockwave enhanced poems like "haiku," which starts out with the rumbling sound of a thunderstorm in the background. Geekgirl also manages to get intelligent, articulate interviews with Internet celebs like RU Sirius and Kathleen Flinn from Microsoft.
★★★★★

INKLINGS
www.inkspot.com/~ohi/ink/inklings.html
Inklings is the Web version of a biweekly e-mail newsletter for writers. It includes reports about new resources for writers on the Net, market information, writers' tips, interviews, and how-

to articles. Here you'll find the latest newsletter, as well as archives of anything you've missed if you're not a subscriber. The advice columns by professional writers are great help for those who are just starting out. There's even a section on how to start your own e-mail newsletter.
★★★

INTERNET HERALD
www.iherald.com
At the Internet Herald you can find out why "Gen-Xers are not cynical." They question

everything not out of negativity, but because of their "positive motivation to create a better life." We don't know if we believe them, but then again, look at our age. Read poems like "Mama's Redheaded Embryo," political essays like "Why no one under 30 should ever vote Democrat" or Web site reviews like "Mr. T and your genitalia."
★★★

JONAS
www.cybercomm.net/~edi/jonas/22/index.html
As Jonas describes itself, it's "more than a zine, it's a lifestyle." The poetry section included some timeless masterpieces like, "The Enforcer," a poem about a certain movie star

we all know and love. "If I was Clint Eastwood I would travel the world, I would beat on some people, I would pick up some girls." And that's just the first three lines! Of course, there are also more serious pieces like the essay titled "Underage Drinking." Good stuff.
★★★★

THE ONION
www.theonion.com
Don't read the stories on this site while you're drinking a Coke, or you'll experience the pain

of shooting carbonated liquid in a stream through your nose. Satirical articles like "Heroic Plastic Surgeon Gives Small-Breasted Starlet Chance At Normal Life" and "Christ returns to the NBA" keep you coming back for each weekly issue. If you're in a hurry, check out each week's "News in brief."
★★★★★

THE POSTFEMINIST PLAYGROUND
www.pfplayground.com
This postfeminist zine answers the question: Why postfeminism? "Because the point of liberation is that at some point, even if you're not totally liberated, you start flaunting your freedom." You'll find everything from technology

reviews to critical essays like "Dear Pusshead." Check out "Essays on boys and girls" for articles like "Honey, Do You Mind That I Don't Shave My Legs?" or "Girl Things: A Guide For Men."
★★★

SAM'S ELECTRONIC REVENGE
pobox.com/slt/revenge/revenge.html
When your time's up, is there any dignified way to go? That's one of the questions that Sam's Electronic Revenge tries to answer on this site. We enjoyed the essay on how to make God popular in the '90s. "A top essential to the popularity of the Great Messiah is a catchy slogan." It's not all fun and games, though. Articles like "The Horrors of Drunk Driving" and "Adventures in Responsibility" make for serious, compelling reading.
★★★★

SNACKCAKE!
www.snackcake.com
Snackcake has more music reviews than Elvis had jumpsuits. But you'll also find interviews with bands like Creeper Lagoon and Ween, and interesting narratives like the one we read on a linoleum floor. "The other great thing about this floor was the fact that it kept the world from spinning." Or the story about the skinny guy who worked on commission, selling clothes at the Big and Tall store, who was always "worried our clientele was going to have a coronary in the fitting room."
★★★★

WACKY.COM
www.wacky.com
"Click on the rubber chicken to enter." Sounds lame, but this site *is* actually pretty wacky, in a good way. The Bill Gates and Me page lets you decide who's more popular: Bill, CEO of Microsoft, or Howie, CEO of Wacky.com. (When we checked, Howie was winning, but not by much.) If you're feeling nostalgia for the toys of your childhood, check out the Amazing Net A Sketch. You can even win the sketch of the month, if you're good.
★★★★

ZIPZAP EZINE - DEEP STYLE MAGAZINE
www.dnai.com/~zipzap/
We aren't really sure why, but this single site contains content from both ZipZap, an e-zine, and Deep Style, the Web version of a paper zine. We liked Deep Style better, with its articles like "How to sedate an insane criminal"

and "Why everything is your fault." ZipZap's comic "Too much coffee man" is definitely worth a peek, though. You can also learn the consequences of "wife-swapping with a giant."
★★★

DAD'S WAR

members.aol.com/dadswar/index.html

Every so often we stumble across a Web site that reminds us that some people are actually doing worthwhile things online. Wesley Johnston is one of those people, and his site is, in its own quiet way, spectacular. No flash, no corporate ads, just a place where people can go to share personal history from WWII.

Johnston spent a lot of time and energy researching his own father's role in the war, writing a book in the process as well as teaching others how to do their own research. A lot goes on here: tips on how to reconstruct missing or destroyed service records, links to countless veterans groups, and an ever-growing list of troop ship crossings. Finally, there are links to the personal histories themselves, told by the veterans who lived them as well as their descendants, where you can read about what it was really like. And by the way—thanks, fellas.

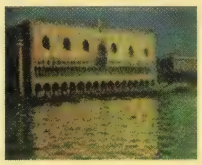
★★★★★

our pick

THE BROOKLYN MUSEUM OF ART

wwar.com/brooklyn_museum/index.html

The BMA's online offerings of browseable art may be limited, but the pieces that do make it onto this site come with excellent documentation. Consider this not so much a gallery of images as a convenient place to catch up on your art history basics and impressive cocktail party vocabulary: "My, what an interesting African ndop figurine you have there!" And if you're planning to visit Brooklyn, send in for a free pass.

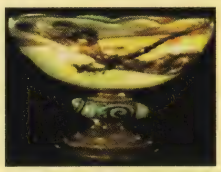


★★★

THE CORNING MUSEUM OF GLASS

www.pennynet.org/glmuseum/corningm.htm

We've all been there. You wake up in the middle of the night in a cold sweat, wondering what the difference is between Jacobite and Williamite glassware, or how the German "jugendstil" fits into the larger picture of art nouveau. Lucky for us, the folks that brought us those cute casserole dishes happen to have a great glassware museum, and a bad-ass Web site to boot. Click onto their "A Resource for Glass" page, and you will find that which you seek: info on glass blowing, mass production of glass, chemical properties of glass—it never ends! And don't miss the "Curator's Choice," where you will see cool photos of groovy artifacts made out of...glass!



★★★

THE GREAT GLOBE GALLERY ON THE WORLD WIDE WEB

hum.amu.edu.pl/~zbzw/glob/glob1.htm

If you happen to know of any flat-Earthers online, kindly direct them to this site. Not only will they find ample graphic proof that the world is round—they will also find proof that the Earth can flip itself upside down, rotate both backward and forward, change its colors to pink and purple, and even transform into strange letter shapes! Don't you know, it's not the hundred or so lurid geophile links that keeps bringing us back: it's the unanswerable question, "Why?"

★★★

THE IMMORTALITY OF FRANKENSTEIN

www.scottiedog.co.uk/welcome.html

Catherine Sellars' fascination with Mary Shelly's *Frankenstein* is rivaled only by the Baron's obsession with the living dead. Her main thesis is that the complexity of the novel, and especially of the Creature's character, stems from "the incongruity between eloquence and appearance." How the Creature is seen is therefore very important to her, and she skillfully charts how graphic representations of the Creature have changed over the past two centuries. Ending up in the '90s, Sellars even provides a well-written assessment of Frankenstein sites online.

★★★★

INTO THE WARDROBE

cslewis.cache.net

As a child you loved the Narnia books by C.S. Lewis, and as an adult you have come to cherish them even more. This charming and attractive site offers an opportunity to learn about the man himself: his writing, his teaching career, his religion. The more academic will want to review the useful bibliography section, or see about an upcoming reading, lecture or short course. The rest of us will quickly click to the "Personal Anecdotes" section, where grown-ups share the delight of perpetual childhood.

★★★★

THE JAPAN WEB SITE

www.geocities.com/Tokyo/3392

So, what do you do after serving 2 years at a Marine Corps air station in Iwakuni, Japan? Apparently you establish one of those Geocities pages we all know and love, and then display snapshots from the day you went to see those really big caves. If you really want to go whole-hog, you can include a few pictures of smiling (fully clothed) Japanese girls, or maybe even a whole section devoted to J-pop star, Kudo Shizuka. Seriously, folks, if you're going to Japan anytime soon, you may want to check out this guy's convenient list of Japanese national holidays. Children's Day is just around the corner!

★★

JOAN'S ROYALTY IN HISTORY PAGE

www.xs4all.nl/~kvenjb/kings.html

Before there was Charles and Diana, there was the madness of George III and the libido of Catherine the Great of Russia. If royal gossip interests you at all, you will definitely want to spend some time on this exquisitely produced home page. All the deliciously lurid details of kingly life are interlinked with a hypertext spider's web that will trap you like a fly for hours at a time. And speaking of flies, did you know that the Roman Emperor Domitian liked to hold them down and rip their little wings off? (Ewww!) After romping through a few centuries of this sort of behavior, test your knowledge with the handy online quiz.

★★★★

LEGENDS OF ATHENS

www.frognet.net/athens-legends/

Strangeness lies just underneath the surface in every community, and Athens, Ohio is no exception. Take one college dormitory built on top of a Shawnee burial site, mix in a runaway slave's ghost that haunts a sorority house, add a hill with strange stone altars, and you get one spooky neighborhood. (Did we forget to mention the UFO sightings?)

★★★

OBJECTIVISM: THE PHILOSOPHY OF AYN RAND

www.aynrand.org/entry.html

You've seen them smoking in cafes, heard them speak out in undergraduate philosophy classes and now you can hang with them online at the Ayn Rand Institute's new Web site. Smooth graphics and links will lead on a tour of a land where "greed is good" and "moral perfection is an unbreached rationality." Sign up for the newsletter, and follow ARI's progress as it slowly expands its talk radio empire, broadcast from five stations, including one in Prescott, Ariz.! Just be warned that "right-wing, Libertarian hippies" are not welcome, and remember: Greed is good.

★★★

VIRTUAL JERUSALEM

www.virtual.co.il

If it's Jewish and virtual, Virtual Jerusalem has it. The site is busting with sections on business, books and religious issues. Get the latest news on the new Jewish settlements and Israeli-Palestinian relations. Read up on the Chilean Ashkenazim in the "World Communities" section. E-mail a prayer and they will put it in the Wailing Wall for you. And, as if that weren't enough, there's an awesome frame-based virtual tour of Old Jerusalem, featuring your own personal tour guide, Daniella. Oy vey, mamacita!

★★★★★

BEARDS, BEARDS AND MORE BEARDS

www.best.com/~bigerbtr/beards/

The Webmaster here has a fetish for facial foliage, and doesn't mind saying so. Beards, he says, make a man "more handsome and definitely sexier than (shudder!) clean-shaven men." To show his admiration for the hirsute, he's collected all kinds of images: bearded historical figures like Abraham Lincoln, artists like John Kricfalusi, celebrities like Sean Connery and just plain folks who've sprouted fur on their faces. The idea is simple, but the exhaustive amount of research, scanning and Photoshopping that went into this site make it more than worth a look. And fellow beard lovers, of course, will have a field day.

★★★★

CHEAP BEER SERVER

jaka.nn.com/~tinsel/beer/index.html

There are times you don't want something that calls itself ale, lager, porter or stout—you just want some beer. This is the Web page for those times: a compendium of blue-collar breweries and their products, reviewed and rated by a Berkeley math student. Here you'll learn that Pabst puts out a ("sour/mediocre") brew that's called, simply, Beer, and that the Jacob Leinenkugel Brewing Co. produced "near beer and soda" back in the days of Prohibition. The site also links to paeans to particular beers, like "Ed's Killian's Red Page" and "The Milwaukee's Best Unofficial Home Page."

★★★

CIGAR AFICIONADO

www.cigaraficionado.com

Somehow the traditional trappings of white maledom are trendy again. This site, the online outgrowth of *Cigar Aficionado* magazine, is an excellent place to pick up pointers about cigar-smoking and other activities associated with "the good life." In addition to stories from the paper edition, it provides a searchable cigar database of every brand reviewed by the magazine since 1992 (you can print out your own "Personal Humidor" that lists the kinds you like), forums on topics like "Health and Cigars," and a beginners' section that will teach you how to store, humidify, cut, light and smoke your Macabi, your Macanudo or your Montecristo. Because sometimes a cigar is just a Web site.

★★★★

FANSONLY

http://www.FANSonly.com/

Bankrolled by the folks who bring you officially licensed college sports sweatshirts, this site aims to be the "total college sports" resource online. That's a big task to tackle, and FANSonly comes up short in a couple of areas (why no Big Ten section?); still, fans can follow along the recruiting trail and keep up on the doings of their favorite gymnasts, wrestlers and water polo players, among others. And then there's the commentary, one piece of which describes Michigan's basketball team as "give-'em-all-blindfolds and shoot-'em-at dawn dispirited." Ouch!

★★★

FLIGHT SIMULATOR FORUM

www.delphi.com/flight/

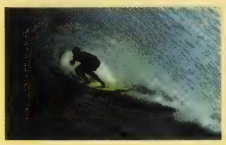
Armchair jet pilots should find the Flight Simulator Forum on Delphi to be right up their runways. The reviewers here wax ecstatic about images of "aerial knights jousting amongst the clouds," while visitors are invited to participate in air combat trivia games. Most useful may be Modem to Modem, a list of players who'll take you on at Head-to-Head, Allied and the like. One caveat: You've got to be a Delphi member to post to the message board or chat areas; if you're not a member, just make your visit here a quick buzz.

★★

INDO SURF AND LINGO

www.peg.apc.org/~indosurf/

"Where is the beach?" "Where are the waves?" In and around Bali, according to this site, which translates those and other questions into Indonesian for surfers searching for some uncrowded beach territory. The Indo Surf and Lingo site is a teaser for a book of the same name, but prospective travelers to the region will pick up a few facts, some of them less than fun—the book apparently devotes a few pages to "how not to die from malaria" and "how to drive without getting killed."



★★

JOYS OF JELL-O

www.teleport.com/~pollywog/jell-o.html

Mike remembers when "Jell-O was so popular it could have been elected the fifth food group." In tribute, he's put up a page presenting the "Joys of Jell-O"—a publication put out by General Foods Kitchens circa 1962 (back in the days when Mom was presumed to be doing all the cooking). Aside from a few dubious sounding dessert recipes, the page doesn't provide much of use, but nostalgia trippers may like the "story of Jell-O," which proudly proclaims a piece of gelatin history: Jell-O "first grandly shimmered its way into American dining rooms in 1897."

★★

MUSTANG WORLD!

users.vnet.net/bubbas/mustang.html

Mostly a categorized list of Mustang resources on the Web, this site gets points for clean layout and careful annotation: You'll find out here where to pick up parts for your "classic 1964¼—1973 Ford Mustang" and where to race your five-liter. The site also has a picture archive and a multimedia page, where what fascinated us most were the sounds—those revving engines and squealing tires are too cool.

★★★

VAGABOND MONTHLY

www2.globaldialog.com/~tpatmaho/

You don't have to be viewing cathedrals in Chartres or frescoes in Florence to have the experience of traveling—there are plenty of fascinating places a mere road trip away, as this site proves. The draw here is the wonderful writing from inveterate adventure-seekers. Here you'll find the tale of a trip to the Fowler farm in Georgia, where the faithful wait for apparitions of the Virgin ("Conyers, Georgia: Eat, Drink and See Mary"); you'll also get a paean to the "tea room that time forgot" in Baltimore, and an essay detailing a day in the life of a trucker ("Myth be damned—a row of parked semis seldom signals a good place to eat"). We liked the selection of letters from readers debating the worth of the Wisconsin Dells, which a writer here called "America's cheesiest resort." Vagabond Monthly publishes in print as well as on the Web, but it's a loosely organized outfit that's run simply for the joy of storytelling. They do pay a bit for the "best" stories received, so if you've got a bit of out-of-the-way Americana to share, this may be the place to do it.

★★★★★

our pick

THE TEMPLE OF SCRAPPLE

www.scrapple.com

Enough Web sites sing the praises of weird foods that it shouldn't come as a surprise to see one devoted to this dish of cornmeal and hog meat—a "delectable amalgamation of tendons, cartilage, feet, skin, ears, nose, gums and more." Still, the regional food-as-religion metaphor is carried a bizarrely long way here; the site includes a feedback form for visitors to send in their own scrapple rites and rituals. Sensitive surfers will want to stay away from the set of instructions on producing homemade scrapple, though we can't resist passing along one tip: "Special care should be taken to remove the eardrums. Left in place, they contribute a distinctively bitter taste to the scrapple which, while popular in Pittsburgh, is generally disliked elsewhere."

★★★★

THE WOMEN OF MARVEL COMICS!

www.geocities.com/Hollywood/2855/

"Because there's more to comics than just guys in tights." Jeanne Burch gives women in tights the attention they deserve at this site—and of course, they aren't just any women. Red Guardian, for example, is a former Olympic athlete, a crimefighter and, in her spare time, a neurosurgeon. We learned here that she was "a valued core member of the early Defenders until her abduction and brainwashing by the Presence." Somebody get her on a TV talk show! Jeanne also runs The Villains of Marvel Comics; she's got fine taste both in comics characters and in Web design.

★★★★

ENTER
www.entermag.com
An all-inclusive e-zine for the college grad, Enter provides not only career advice but (if you'll pardon the hackneyed phrase) survival skills for the world of work, taxes and renter's insurance. Feature articles at the

site include "How to invest $50" and "So You Wanna Be a Professional Wrestler..." One story quotes some CEOs on what they like to see in the people they interview; for example, Sidney Swartz of the Timberland Company says, "What really grabs me is when someone looks me right in the eye and says, 'I really want to work for your company because...' Those simple words are more important to me than most of the other things you can show on your résumé or talk about during the interview." Some of the content here, like "Spanish Fly on the Rocks" (a rundown of suggestively named cocktails), is just meant to entertain, but features like the interactive "Loan Ranger" calculator make the site useful, too.
★★★★★

our pick

AMERICA'S JOB BANK
www.ajb.dni.us
You're not the only one who wants you to have a job; the government wants you out there working and paying taxes, too. The public Employment Service, which "helps provide the American labor force with an increased number of opportunities to find work and realize their career goals," has a Web site that you can use to look through the jobs listed with various state-run employment services. This is an especially good source for people looking for less technical jobs (one of the biggest categories seems to be "vehicle operators").
★★★

CAREERMOSAIC
www.service.com/cm/cm1.html
One of the first job databases on the Web and still one of the best, CareerMosaic has

plenty of postings, plus online job fairs and links to employer profiles. Best of all, it's global: We found ads for a forensic pollen specialist in New Zealand and a sales support manager in the Netherlands.
★★★★★

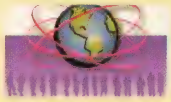
CAREERPATH.COM
www.careerpath.com
CareerPath.com brings together the classified sections of different online newspapers for simultaneous searching—select from a list of participating newspapers (from the Akron *Beacon Journal* to *The Washington Times*), enter a category and/or keywords, and you're off. When we visited, the site proclaimed that 167,753 help-wanted ads were available for the searching; that's about 100,000 more than some of the major online-only databases. It's also purged of old job listings more frequently than most career databases: every two weeks, rather than every 60 days. Quantity *and* quality!
★★★★★

COLLEGE GRAD JOB HUNTER
www.collegegrad.com
Nervous new entrants into the job market will want to head here and be soothed by the friendly graphics and clearheaded advice, all culled from the latest edition of College Grad Job Hunter. The whole book is online, and you can e-mail its author for a personal answer to your job search question (if it isn't already answered on the site). You'll also find job listings and internship positions with companies like Apple, IBM and Netscape.
★★★★

HARD@WORK
www.hardatwork.com
Sort of like *Dilbert* cartoons with a practical slant, Hard@Work aims to "reduce the oversupply of fear and alienation in the workplace by meeting the pent-up demand for constructive communication about what's happening

on the job." Founders Mark Gozonsky and Dennis E. Murphy think that working hard should feel fun and satisfying; to that end, they provide their own informal style of mentoring, and the opportunity to ask other site visitors for advice with work-related problems like how to manage volunteers.
★★★★

HEADHUNTER.NET
www.HeadHunter.NET
Here's the site HR reps have been waiting for: one that offers free listings to applicants and employers. Produced by a software consulting company, it seems like a great service, though we can't quite figure out how it makes money (members who choose to pay a premium get



some kind of preferential posting). Since it was free to look at the résumé cache, we snuck a peek. Now we want someone to tell us whose idea résumé "objectives" (like "To secure a position that will utilize my talents to promote individual opportunity and professional growth, while making positive contributions to the organization") were, so that we can go and strangle them.
★★★

JOBHUNT
www.job-hunt.org
To really do it right, what you need for your job search is a meta-list: one clean, selective set of links to all the worthwhile classified ad sources on the Web. Dane Spearing has done an excellent job of compiling such a list. His job hunt page offers over 700 indexed and annotated links. You'll find pointers to some resources tailored to particular kinds of jobs, like Job Listings in Academia or the BioSpace Career Center; hundreds of general job search services are here, too (the best are marked with a smiley face, so you don't miss 'em).
★★★★

JOBTRAK
www.jobtrak.com
Jobtrak started in '87 as a service that let employers list job openings with several hundred college career centers without having to contact each individually. Now all of the entry-level openings Jobtrak circulates are available on the Web, too. The site is great for college grads; don't miss the Riley Guide, a thorough set of how-tos for using the Internet to facilitate your search.
★★★★

MY BOSS
www.myboss.com
Stuck working for an "under-trained, underbrained, insensitive idiot?" This site offers a chance to vent your spleen to the world. The creation of a group of friends who'd shared hours of boss-from-hell horror stories, My Boss solicits submissions from visitors and puts them up for perusal. Read the story of the

boss who changed his department's order for color monitors to black and white (paper is white and ink is black, so that's all you need, right?), or the boss who thought revealing confidential information to customers about their competitors would "build trust." And if you can't take any more crap from your own taskmaster, the site also has down-to-earth tips on job hunting and interviewing.
★★★★

MONSTER BOARD
www.monster.com
It's not what you know, it's who you e-mail. The Internet job bank with the coolest name also has one of the biggest databases out there—and appealing graphics, to boot. Searching for jobs and posting résumés is free; employers pony up a few bucks to list classified ads and to get access to "Résumé City." We liked an ad for a "copy sidekick" at an advertising firm in Anchorage, Alaska: "No 'dudes.' No prima donnas."

★★★★★

ACER COMPUTER

www.acer.com/aac/contest/

Acer promises to give away a computer every month during 1997 (an Acer computer, obviously). On our last visit, the giveaway was a 900Pro model (180MHz Pentium processor,

32 MB RAM, 8X CD-ROM); notebooks, desktop systems and servers have been given away in the past. To enter, you have to fill out a fairly lengthy online form about your computing habits. And if you're Canadian, you have to answer an additional question (so that it isn't a "game of chance")—something like, "1) Multiply 1996 times 501. 2) Add 6,843,221 to the answer from Step 1. 3) Subtract 3,462,986 from the answer to Step 2.4) Divide the answer from Step 3 by 3."

★★★

ALPHA SPORTS GAMES

www.ctactics.com/alpha/alpha.html

Your sports acumen could net you a few bucks at this site, which lets registered participants compete for cash by predicting the results of pro, college and even imaginary games (what if the Colorado Avalanche and Philadelphia Flyers

teamed up against the Seattle Supersonics?). Some of it seems a little silly, but according to the Winners' Circle page, several hundred dollars are handed out to contest winners every week, so it might be worth a shot.

★★

ADVENTURES 4U LIMERICK CONTEST

www.halcyon.com/adven4u/contest.htm

This venture, "Adventures 4U,"
Has a limerick contest, it's true.
Just write them a rhyme
And submit it in time;
You can win a free trip if you do.

★★

THE LEE ATWATER INVITATIONAL DEAD POOL

home.earthlink.net/~ghicks/

This celebrity dead pool invites its entrants to "Play along and root for your favorites as we go for the gold that lies in the back teeth of

the rich and feeble." You probably know people who've pooled money to bet on the baseball season or the Academy Awards—with this pool, you bet on which celebrities will kick the bucket in the coming year. At year's end, the top three winning entrants split the dough. Even if you don't play, there's plenty of macabre fun to be had just in reading the contest rules, which include the Dean Martin Clause, the Deng Xiaopeng Provision and the Carl Sagan Stipulation.

★★★★★

THE CONTEST CATALOGUE

www3.catalogue.com/contests/index.html

Sponsored by an ISP, this site is a huge resource for Internet games and giveaways of all kinds. Among the offerings at the sites it lists are Nintendo 64s, mountain bikes, big-screen TVs, snowboards—tons of consumerist clutter, free to the winning entrants. Our favorite contest was one sponsored by photographer Clive Warren (www.bel-epa.com/

studios/clive/): If you can identify where four photographs were taken, you win signed prints!

★★★★

CONTESTWORLD

www.contestworld.com

The title here would suggest a big index of contests on the Web, but actually the offerings are rather sparse; all Contestworld seems to do is solicit ad banners from Web sites that run contests. On the plus side, it does put the banners into categories: "Win Money," "Win Travel," "Free Stuff." Oh, and a jukebox with "various MIDI files for your listening pleasure as you browse" (our favorite was the rendition of Billy Idol's "White Wedding").

★★

GATEWAY 2000 CONTESTS

www.gw2k.com/cool/contest/conhub.htm

Here's a place to pick up Gateway 2000 hardware or other prizes just for writing a poem about cows, sending in an ASCII rendition of a

cow, drawing a cow...Well, you get the idea. Gateway's aim seems to be to get its customers to visit the site and get them thinking about the upgrades they could order. It worked on us—we had to envy Doug W. of Plainfield, Ill., who got a color printer, scanner, digital camera, recordable CD-ROM drive and 3.8 gigabyte hard drive after he sent in the winning entry in the Funniest Videos contest.

★★★

INTERNATIONAL CULINARY GUIDE

www.zurqui.com/crinfocus/culinary/culinary.html

Got a favorite family recipe? Submit it at this site, and if it's used in an upcoming CD-ROM called International Culinary Guide 2000, you'll get $500 cash money, honey. The contest deadline isn't until Nov. 30, 1999, which gives you plenty of time to enter—but won't help you if you're hoping for some extra cash before the next millennium. There's a $5 entry fee, and you have to send in a picture with the fee and your recipe—but at least once you've made and photographed your food, you'll get to eat it.

★★

SWEEPSTAKES ONLINE

www.sweepstakesonline.com

Don't have time to hunt down all the contests and sweepstakes that are out there on the Web? Sweepstakes Online has a service that, for a fee, will automatically enter you in up to 100 different ones each day. Of course, there's no guarantee you'll win any of them, or that you'll like the prizes that you do win (would you really want all those mouse pads that Web sites give away?). Still, it might be fun to see what sort of stuff washes up on the virtual beach. Sweepstakes Online also offers plenty of contest links to visitors, and a Sweepstakes Tip of the Day (like "always read the fine print to prevent scams and ineligibility").

★★★

WIN $10 MILLION

www.campussubs.com

You guessed it: Publisher's Clearing House is now on the Net. This is the best prize we've found offered on the Web (who couldn't use $10 million?), but we're not sure it's the best contest—it's hard to tell whether your entry could possibly get you anything. To all appearances, the multimillion-dollar enticement is still being used to lure visitors through a list of magazine subscriptions to the contest registration page: "Most people only enter our Sweepstakes when they receive our Bulletins in the mail. But you can visit the Campus Subscriptions home page and enter for a chance to win millions once every single day...7 times a week...365 times a year! So enter now and enter every day for the most chances to win $10,000,000!" But when we read the fine print, it turned out that the "giveaway end" was Jan. 15, 1997. Bummer! One fun fact we found out, though, is how Publisher's Clearing House pays out its prizes: $500,000 the first year, $250,000 every year until the 30th year, when there's a final payment of $2.5 million.

★

WINBIG: EASY AND FAST ENTRY SWEEPSTAKES & CONTESTS

www.ok-web.com/winbig/

This simple listing of contests on the Web breaks them down into "Four star," "Three star" and "Other." The only problem is that it's hard to tell why something qualifies as a four-star contest; the trips to Hawaii and Jeep Grand Cherokees look good, sure, but we also found listings for "sample Jelly Bellys" and "a Southwestern keychain." Huh? One nice feature of the site, though, is that it outlines basic rules (age requirement, deadline date and number of times you can enter) next to each listing.

★★

YOYODYNE

www.yoyo.com

Not only does this company have a cool domain name, it has a cool mission: to help lure visitors to Web sites by designing fun games and contests. Click on the "play our games" link to see a list of currently running games (and their sponsoring sites); on our last visit, prizes included a trip to the World Series, a Mazda Miata and $100,000. In most cases, all it takes to register for the prize drawings is your e-mail address. When you're done playing, you can visit Yoyodyne's hot list (links to sites like the WWWF Grudge Match and the Psychiatric Ward), or leave a link to your own home page.

★★★★

ACTION ON SMOKING AND HEALTH (ASH)

ash.org

ASH is an organization that aims to extinguish cigarettes, or at least curtail their use. You'll find studies and statistics here on the dangers of cigarette smoking: One news item when we visited said that "the level of nicotine in the blood of newborns is virtually the same level

found in their smoking moms," so that babies may suffer withdrawal symptoms after birth. The conspirators here are, of course, greedy tobacco companies; click on Secret Documents for background on the Liggett & Myers settlement, Congressional testimony on tobacco and America's youth, and the FDA's proceeding to regulate nicotine as a drug.

★★★★★

AREA 51 RESEARCH CENTER

www.ufomind.com/org/

The military installation that the United States government supposedly doesn't want anyone to know about may be, oddly enough, its most famous one. The installation's namesake center is a "private research and publishing company" that claims to be dedicated to uncovering the government's stash of secrets. (Wouldn't it be disappointing if the government turned out not to have any cool secrets?) Check out Ufomind, an online research library for UFOs, paranormal phenomena, military intelligence and more. Area 51 Research Center sells some books and things online; whether it's raising needed funds for its investigative efforts or just capitalizing on people's paranoia, we can't deny the worth of this site as a starting point for all the spooky stuff out there.

★★★★

EXECUTIVE INTELLIGENCE REVIEW

www.larouchepub.com

Never mind Ross Perot or Al Sharpton; Lyndon LaRouche is still the best politico to make fun of, ever. This is the official site for the man who ran a presidential campaign from federal prison—thinly disguised as a news source of sorts. It's suggested here that the mass media brainwashes folks about LaRouche, so we could just be victims of mind control, but we still can't help thinking that he's a pretty whacked-out dude. A Eurasian land bridge will save the world's economy? Tony Blair has been groomed as Margaret Thatcher's successor? George Bush's dad brought Adolf Hitler to power? Give him credit, at least, for coming up with theories that are all his own.

★★

THE FLAT EARTH SOCIETY

www.flat-earth.org

These aren't serious conspiracy theorists; rather, they're an amusing bunch of netizens whose self-description can hardly be improved upon: "While the Society is not a 'crackpot' group, it is opposed to the fashionable, politically correct Spherical Earth theory, which is expounded every day by so-called 'scientists,' the media and political leaders. The Society asserts that the Earth is flat and has five sides, that all places in the Universe named Springfield are merely links in higher-dimensional space to one place, and that all assertions are true in some sense, false in some sense, meaningless in some sense, true and false in some sense, true and meaningless in some sense, false and meaningless in some sense, and true, false and meaningless in some sense."

★★★★★

THE GREAT MARIJUANA CONSPIRACY

www.iahushua.com/Hemp.html

This thoughtful essay espouses the proposition that marijuana was "criminalized" in 1937 because the hemp industry threatened foresting, petrochemical and pharmaceutical concerns. It also attributes the "gateway myth" (the idea that the use of marijuana leads to hard drug use) to the head of the Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs, said here to have been acting out of prejudice against pot-smoking jazz musicians. Links to related pages (like "George Washington Grew Hemp!") are presented at the end.

★★★

HANGAR 18

hangar18.horizonco.com/index.html

Dedicated largely to the rumored spaceship crash at Roswell, N.M. in 1947 ("the mother of all UFO scenarios"), Hangar 18 is a well-organized source for history and new developments in the watch for evidence of intelligent alien life. On our last visit, we found a summary of Dr. Roger Leir's examination of alleged implants removed from abductees, as well as a discussion of the alien autopsy aired on the Fox network, from both sides: "Someone give Jonathan Frakes a real job, please!"

★★★★★

HUGH'S HAARP INFO PAGE

www.primenet.com/~rfwatts/haarp/haarp.html

"High-frequency Active Auroral Research Project: science or the Tesla Death Ray?" The maintainer of this site hasn't made up his mind about the fuss over the HAARP military research project in Alaska, but he's intrigued and, after reading this page, so were we. Hugh links to official sources, including some unclassified papers on ionospheric research. He also covers the they-might-be-paranoid side in detail: "radio hams, environmental cognoscenti and anyone else who became a little uneasy about the Pentagon rearranging their molecules for them." Don't miss the background on inventor Nikolai Tesla, or the thorough list of related links.

★★★★★

IS TUPAC DEAD???

http://members.aol.com/subseven/tupac.html

One of several sites on the Web to pose the question, Is Tupac Dead??? sorts through the "evidence" that rapper Tupac Shakur faked his own death. It begins with the fact that he died on Friday the 13th, continues through an examination of the video for "I Ain't Mad At Cha" (released posthumously) and adds in some numerological acrobatics and literary references. Most of the material seems like far-fetched speculation—but if a misspelling on a tombstone has been enough to keep Elvis fans talking for decades, the Tupac-is-alive theory may well be around for a while.

★★

MICROSOFT AND THE BAVARIAN ILLUMINATI

www.zikzak.net/~acb/writing/ms-illuminati.html

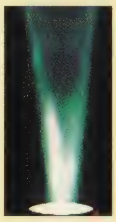
We all know Bill Gates didn't get where he is today by mere luck—what we didn't know, until reading this page, is that he's involved with the Illuminati. The "cosmic secrets" behind the facade of a successful company are explored here, with hermetic allegories and coded messages hidden in the software, and suggestions of a secret pentagonal building at the Microsoft campus in Redmond, Wash. Of course (c'mon, y'all), it's a joke, but so subtly done that it reads just like the convoluted connections made by earnest and intelligent conspiracy theorists. Very clever!

★★★

THE REAL X-FILES

homepages.enterprise.net/smokey/index.html

No, this site has nothing to do with Scully or Mulder. In the same vein as *The X-Files* and *In Search Of*, the author of the site recounts unsolved mysteries (though not like that awful NBC show). Things like the Philadelphia Experiment: Project Invisibility, and the infamous 1872 disappearance of Captain Briggs, his crew and his ship, the Marie Celeste, are curious topics of discussion. Particularly strong writing, despite the infrequent typo, relate all of the mysterious events with great relish.



★★★

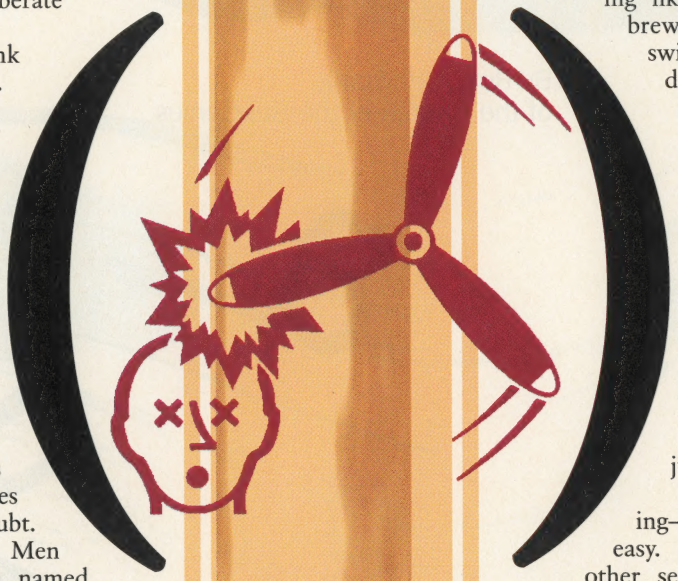
STRANGE MAGAZINE

www.strangemag.com

Exploring such odd topics as Red Rain (or blood rain), Globsters (carcasses of unidentified sea creatures) and the art of honest deception (the psychology of magic and trickery), Strange Magazine is a schlocky and, we must admit, fun read. Apparently, the Web site is the online companion to a biannual 68-page publication of the same name—we've never heard of it, either. The site ain't pretty, but every other feature is worthy of a quick read.

★★★

►ONLINE ANDROGYNY: M OR F—OR NONE OF THE ABOVE?◄



by Raphael Carter

I am an androgyne in real life. Some people who meet me wonder what sex I am; others are sure they know, but their certainties don't agree. I've met other androgynes, though not many. Some, like me, are androgynes thanks to a chance combination of traits; others achieve androgyny by a deliberate mixing of messages.

On the Net, you'd think there'd be a lot of androgynes. After all, the Net hides the physical cues by which others recognize our sex—voice pitch, body size, shape. It lets us present ourselves purely with words.

But there's nothing new about hiding the body. Clothes have been doing that since prehistory, albeit only partially. Yet most people use clothes to assert, not mask, their sex. On the Net, full names and home pages stand in for mascara and neckties as ways of extinguishing doubt. There are glitches, to be sure. Men named Stephane and women named Michael have trouble. But most find some way to resolve the ambiguity. One fellow I knew even put it in his signature: "PLEASE! In Russia, Misha is a man's name."

An ambiguous name or handle doesn't make you genderless, either. First of all, there are few names with no gender associations. Most people assume Pat is a woman and Chris a man. Call yourself Mink, and they'll be sure you're female—quite as if minks reproduced by parthenogenesis. Go by Wolf, and you must be male, there being no female wolves in the bestiaries of the urban mind.

Even if your name is truly ambiguous, people will rarely ask what sex you are. Instead, they'll assume a sex for you. Most often, they'll treat you as male until proven otherwise. That *New Yorker* cartoon got it only half right: True, on the Internet nobody knows you're a dog; the bad news is that everyone thinks you're a cat.

I used to frequent a network where most people used their full names. Once, though, a new bulletin board joined the network, bringing immigrants who went by initial and surname: lpeters, mjohnson, dsilva. No one thought to ask the newcomers what sex they were. Over the months, casual remarks revealed the truth, and many of us found out we had been wrong—not half the time, but nearly half.

I've seen this again and again. We cherish the belief that men and women communicate very differently, just as we insist that our favorite brand of beer or cola is nothing like the competitor's inferior brew. Yet when the labels are switched, we often can't tell the difference. A gender role is not a single icon, but a multitude: the manly man, the businessman, the nerd, the sissy. Somewhere in there is a stereotype to explain anything you might do. So if your communication style doesn't match the pop-psych code, people won't suspect you of being the other sex. They'll just shuffle you into a different sub-gender, and judge you accordingly.

So on the Net, cross-dressing—or rather, cross-naming—is easy. Learning to "pass" as the other sex at the nightclub or the grocery store can take years of work. On the Net, it's a bitflip. It's so easy that no one knows how common it may be.

But it's hard to remember that we don't always know each other's sexes on the Net. Some people, on some newsgroups, use gender-free pronouns like "sie" or "ey" for anyone who hasn't expressed a preference for "he" or "she." But most people go on acting as if gender were as clear online as we like to think it is offline.

The fantasy of leaving the body behind shapes many people's ideas about the Net. On the Net, say transhumanists, we leave our bodies behind; we transcend race and sex. And that bodilessness, Luddites claim, is dangerous; we need to turn off our computers and interact as human beings. But if we don't interact as human beings on the Net, then what, exactly, do we interact as? We are still apes on Usenet; we love and we hate—mostly, alas, the latter.

We drag our bodies along with us onto the Net; we're too corporeal to do anything else. We may like to think of ourselves as ethereal beings hovering in cyberspace, but we're more like Elmer Fudd walking off a cliff—so sure of our ground that we may never notice that nothing is holding us up. ●

Raphael Carter is the author of a science-fiction novel, *The Fortunate Fall* (Tor Books), and maintains a Web site at **www.wavefront.com/~raphael/**.

E-mail @ Large

By Rev. Ivan Stang
of the Church of the SubGenius

I suddenly and paranoically wondered what it would be like if we could e-mail physical objects, including living organisms, over the Internet. They do it all the time on *Star Trek*, and wirelessly to boot. Scottie makes it all look so easy. But think of the transporter in the early days of its development, when it was more like the gizmo in David Cronenberg's remake of *The Fly*. Glitches in that process caused a big mess, indeed, and Jeff Goldblum was just sending himself across a room through great big fat cables. Imagine if he had been doing that through a 14.4 AOL connection.

I know, I know; there are a few more technical breakthroughs to be made before we can render an entire human being, every synapse and eyebrow mite included, as a binary. No doubt we'll have to start out modestly, turning things like golf balls into 15-jillion-meg files, hoping they're still round when they decode on the other end, and not inside out, with the deadly poison from the center coating on the outside. Jeff Goldblum initially had that problem with his lab rats.

But even when they get the process down, one wouldn't want to e-mail one's self anywhere. Even zipped, it would take too long and cost more than a plane flight, and the risk of corruption in transit would be too high. Instead, you would send a "copy" of yourself in extremely low-res, compressed form—some kind of fast-growing, "just add water" clone—a veritable "GIF version" of yourself.

You could e-mail yourself saying "HI GRANDMA" to your grandma. First, you would stand in your cloning stall, set it to record for five seconds, and say what you wanted to say. You'd hit "SAVE AS: HIGRANNY.CLO," compress that file, and send it as an e-mail attachment. If your image were a 600 dpi Photoshop document, the clone e-mail that Granny would receive would instead be a JPEG compressed at Lowest Quality, around 5%, and all blurry around the edges. And none too aromatic, either.

After a two-hour download, the clone of you would materialize in Granny's Download Tank, stumble out, say its message and then collapse on her floor in a smelly pile of putrescence. I imagine Download Tanks will be equipped with drains and a water hose for washing away the fleshy e-mail residue.

Let's be practical here, and consider that merely transmitting patterns of electrons isn't enough. The mass of the physical object being e-mailed has to generate from some organic mass; even a low res person would require the mass of at least one large sheep. Anyone who wanted to receive a living e-mail would have to keep a freezer full of frozen animals (probably cheap clones) which makes for one rather expensive, and messy, electronic message.

A more hygienic technique might be to e-mail just a few cells scraped from your body. Granny's Eudora Pro 666 would not only analyze and decompress the cell, but insta-clone it into a brainless vegetable that looked exactly like you. The problem would be getting the mindless fleshbag to actually say, "Hi, Granny."

Wait, would the main users of this technique be the cybersex and porno binaries crowd? Probably. Badly "krakked" versions of Anna Nicole Smith and other starlets would be traded illegally in binaries newsgroups, sucking up bandwidth that could be better used for e-mailing, say, medicines, sips of fine, rare wines or boxes of Thin Mint Girl Scout cookies.

And think of the types of viruses that would start circulating! Viruses that wouldn't stop at just eating your computer's memory.

Be afraid. Be very afraid.

"Perhaps...Perhaps there are some things that Man was not meant to know. When Man, in his great vanity, meddles with the Unknown, and seeks to pry into the secrets of God, Nature will surely exact a terrible price."

UNDERGROUND

IU

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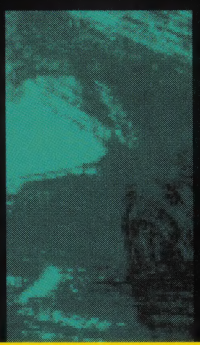

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